

RELIGIOUS
CORRESPONDENCE:
OR THE
DISPENSATION OF DIVINE
GRACE VINDICATED.

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RELIGIOUS
CORRESPONDENCE:

OR THE
DISPENSATION
OF
DIVINE GRACE VINDICATED,
FROM THE
EXTREMES OF LIBERTINE AND
FANATICAL PRINCIPLES:

IN A SERIES OF
LETTERS TO A LADY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXXV.

ЛІБЕЛЛ
ДЛЯ ПІДПИСУ
КОРRESPONDENCE
ІЗ АРХІВАНОГО
ДІАЛЕКТА

ОДИНІ ІЗЧИСЛЕНІ

СКАЗКА ПРО БІЛУ СНЕЖНЮХУ
І МОУДІЛІВІДІВІЧА



2 Я ВІДПРАВІ
УДАЛА ОТКЛІТТЕЛ
— ОВІДІІВІКА
— СІМІЛОДОВІІ
— ТЕІЛІТІВІСА 1209

1 Nov.

ІЗЛОВІ ОТВІ

ІМОДІІВІ

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ІЗЛОВІ АРДІ БІЛУ СНЕЖНЮХУ

8

TO HIS GRACE
THE ARCHBISHOP
OF
CANTERBURY;
THE FOLLOWING
LETTERS
ARE INSCRIBED,
MOST RESPECTFULLY,
BY
HIS GRACE'S
VERY HUMBLE SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.



ERRATA.

Line. Page.

7. 7. For *attachments*, — read *attachment*.
— 8. — *malevolence of*: — *malevolence. Of*
— 18. 1. — *no reasonable right*, — *no right*.
— 40. 14. — *at existence* : — . (a full Point).
— 48. 16. — *the most perfect*, — *our purest*.
— 59. 4. — *to another*, — *upon another*.
— 73. 18. — *abaurate*, — *obdurate*.
— 96. ult. *ferven*, — *fervent*.
115. at the end of the Note, add, *See the picture*
described in the Dialogue of Cebes.
128. 2. — *meekness*, — *meetness*.
151. 19. — *joy. You*, — *joy, you*.
211. 13. — *of a common*, — *of common*.
241. 1. — *(what is called chance)* — *(what is called)*
chance.

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ПРЕДСЛОВИЕ

P R E F A C E.

THE following Letters contain the Substance of a Correspondence, which originated from a Sentiment expressed by the Author, but not admitted by his Friends; "That the Doctrines of Grace in the Gospel, with their Evidence, might be referred to the good Sense of an intelligent Person, with no less Success than the Truths of Morality and Natural Religion." Whether the Author has supported his Position, and executed his Design successfully, the candid Public will determine. But the Attempt

PREFACE

Attempt is new, the Argument simple, and the Light in which the Subject is placed, obvious to those of plain Understandings. To prove that the Evidence of the Truth of the Gospel amounts to Certainty, is a Design that must engage the Attention of all who have any Regard to Religion.

L E T T E R

LETTER I.

RELIGION, though
R[eligion] is the most interesting
object of the human
heart, is, in the opinion of
men of reflection, treated with
less decency by the present age,
than any other subject of ge-
neral concern. That it is
wholly neglected by one great
body of men, and grossly mis-
represented by another, whilst
a few only think, and act, with
propriety concerning it, is the
persuasion of all men of thought.
Libertine principles, though not
B[elief] professed,

S The Design. Let. I.

professed, are really adopted, by the generality of mankind; whilst a very considerable number continue to disfigure Christianity by Fanaticism: Amidst these extremes Religion suffers essentially, and is in danger of being lost in Britain. According to the natural tendency of things, and by the righteous judgement of God, we are in danger of reverting to that darkness and superstition, out of which, by the favour of Providence, we lately emerged.

Between infidelity and superstition, there is a stricter connection than is generally apprehended. I would not detain you by attempting, at present, to illustrate this connection. To you

you it will occur, that when men have permitted the true Object of worship to escape their attention, and have lost all just ideas of Him, they will, in the distressful scenes of life, have recourse to a Deity consonant to the habitual tone of their own minds. In danger, the savage flees to his God for protection. Men, inured to sensible objects, and strangers to the Divine character, will, in calamity, betake themselves to a Divinity congenial to their own souls. The superficial ideas formed by frivolous minds of that God whom they habitually neglect, will not satisfy them amidst the important evils of life. They flee to one corresponding to the grossness introduced into their intellectual powers.

The philosophical sages of modern times, adepts in the knowledge of human nature, have, with a zeal proportioned to the ardour of their wishes, promoted the cause of infidelity. Apostles of divers denominations are commissioned to propagate libertine principles among all ranks, and in all places; and their assiduity can be equalled only by their success. Nor is their courage much inferior to either; for they have adventured to tell their disciples what can be swallowed only by such as are befooled by false philosophy, or besotted by dissipation. These they have acquainted with a marvellous expedient, when, at any time they might judge it necessary to apply to God,

God,—“ To place between Him
“ and their own minds, some visi-
“ ble object of worship.” Nor have
they scrupled to produce the wise
policy of modern Rome, in sup-
port of this wonderful effort of
human sagacity. Neither do they
hesitate to develope the grand
and ultimate object of their
most meritorious mission,—
“ The project of reconciling the
“ minds of the British nation to
“ arbitrary and despotic govern-
“ ment.” Those whose minds are
fettered by superstition, will ea-
sily be induced to stretch forth
their hands to the chains of
despotic controul. Men who
are enslaved by dissipated ha-
bits, can be free in no sense what-
soever *.

* See Hume's History, *passim.*

Other advocates we have, of an inferior denomination, for the cause of Libertinism, more fly, but no less dangerous. They admit certain truths in our Religion; but this they do, that they may undermine the rest. Having extracted from Christianity it's essential and vital principles *, the inert remainder will quickly be rejected by all men of sense and spirit.

When you observe such plans of thinking received with approbation, and their authors carelessly and richly compensated by those of the first rank, you will be at no loss to form a true judgement of the state of Religion, as well as of the under-

* Dr. Priestly, and his followers.

standings.

standings and the hearts of such as take the lead in the most important concerns of mankind.

On the other hand, there are not wanting numbers professing the strictest attachments to the general truths of religion, who injure essentially the good cause they intend to maintain: having contracted a certain fondness for peculiar tenets, favourite phrases, and words, in estimation with some admired leaders; of those they are more tenacious than of what is stamped with Divine authority. And such as have not for these nostrums the same superstitious veneration, they do not hold to be objects of Christian charity. Such as

B 4 understand.

understand the distinction betwixt the opinions of men, and the doctrines of God, they regard with jealousy, often with malevolence: of intolerant principles and narrow views, they scruple not to support the party they have espoused, by the only remaining means of persecution against those, who, in all that is essential, hold the same precious faith with themselves. They maintain the authority of their favourite teachers, at the expence of what is most essential in Religion.

Those, naturally of amiable tempers and warm hearts, who have tasted the sweets of enthusiasm, wish to drink deep of the cup. If they are indulged in their

their imagination, the whole frame of their minds will quickly become disordered, and involve them in most pernicious errors. Their hearts are tainted, their souls distorted, and their whole sentiments and behaviour receive a tincture of what is wild and disgusting. They regard the fictions of a frantic imagination, more than the truths of God, or than even the mandates of the most favourite divines; and, trusting to impressions, inspirations, visions, and revelations, they overleap those mounds whereby society is preserved in peace. Among us Fanaticism hath not, in many instances, appeared in these enormous colours, but an unbridled imagination leads to every excess, nor are there wanting

wanting some alarming symptoms of this malady. Circumspection becomes those who are well disposed to Religion, and by such the beginnings of an evil so malignant in its influence will be checked.

Whatever tends to disfigure or discredit the Christian profession, will be carefully avoided by the real friends of Religion. Libertines are quick sighted, as to the errors of the Religious; if the latter betray artifice, or prevaricate in any degree with Religion, by the former they will be quickly detected. We charge Scepticks and Infidels with dishonesty. Certain it is, that when a man of understanding rejects the obvious dictates of common

common sense, he forfeits the character of uprightness—or his brain is distempered. Good men are zealously cautious against the dishonour of Religion. Extremes originate from artifice, but their noxious influence may be more fully explained, if I shall be indulged leisure and health to execute your commands.

In giving an account of the dispensation of divine grace, you will please to observe, that I shall appeal continually to your own good sense, as the standard to which the great and leading truths of Religion ought to be referred. To a mind seriously disposed, it will appear no less necessary to acquiesce in the judgement

judgement we instantly form upon the perception of obvious truth, than it is to rest in the evidence of our senses, in judging of external objects. Nor is there less absurdity, and disingenuity, in rejecting the former than the latter. By this standard you will form a true judgement both of the cavils of Libertines, and of what may be offered in defence of the Truth; for thus only we arrive at certainty, which the human mind most anxiously desires in Religion. That in the commencement, progress, and conclusion of our enquiries, our minds may be enlightened by the Spirit of Truth, is the earnest prayer of him, who has the honour to be,

Madam,

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

MADAM,

R ELIGION, when exhibited to the mind in its native purity, free from adventitious ornaments, and the inventions of men, will recommend itself to the reason and conscience of mankind, by its beautiful simplicity, and by its happy tendency to re-unite the soul to God, and raise it to perfection. Such as are unpractised in the arts of self-seduction, and have not been corrupted by weak or designing men, will feel their attention engaged,

engaged, and their hearts captivated, by the dispensation of divine grace, contained in the Gospel. A plain, simple, and concise account of it, guarded against extremes of every denomination, and exclusive of those tenets, about which good men differ, may, by the blessing of God, operate on their minds the most solitary effects. The candid mind only will admit the truth. To those alone who are free from the delusive influence of artifice, would I offer the grace of the Gospel. Minds prepossessed by artificial systems, inflamed with zeal for modes and circumstances of no importance, or determined against Religion as a trivial object; all of this mode of thinking will admit no truth

truth opposed to their prejudices: for their minds are closed and shut up, and can discern no excellence in whatever does not coincide with their preconceived opinions.

Of all others, our modern pretenders to freedom of thought and enquiry, and to superior wisdom and knowledge, are least qualified to admit the truth; for they are distinguished by their bigotry, and enslaved by that artifice, which originates from the domination of imperious passions. Hence their reasonings, employed to prove that all nations have always been so well informed of the truths that concern their duty and happiness, as to render all further discoveries unnecessary;

unnecessary; though any novice in classical learning was qualified to expose the futility of these reasonings, they produced a religious dispute, which, upon any other subject, would have been deemed impertinent.

If the Lord of a great family, who had gone into a far country, should transmit to his domesticks instructions, superadded to those he had left with them, occasioned by their mismanagement or neglect; if some of his servants should affect to contemn such instructions as superfluous, on account of their being, without them, already sufficiently acquainted with their lord's intentions; would not the sober part of the family treat such pertulence

tulence with contempt, and apply themselves to know the reality and import of such second intimation of their Lord's intentions? With no less contempt ought all those laboured enquiries to have been treated, concerning the sublime heights of moral perfection, to which mankind, by their own efforts, might easily arrive. For it is abundantly obvious, that most men are far from conducting themselves with wisdom and prudence in matters of Religion. Upon this subject they have kept no measures with reason or common sense.

To reason and common sense it is obvious, that the gracious Parent of mankind may confer undeserved favours upon

such as have no reasonable right to expect them;—favours contrary to their desert;—reveal his kind intentions to a certain number,—and invite them, in the most affectionate manner, to partake of these unmerited blessings. Who can deny that this is the prerogative of God! Who can deny that the Gospel contains a declaration of this import?

To engage our attention to truths already known but neglected,—to rouse our minds to obligations the most sacred, and interests the most momentous, but generally disregarded,—to banish profligate deities and profane rites, to conduct mankind to a pure Religion, and a worship worthy of God to receive,

ceive, and of man to offer,—to effect the wonderful change Christianity hath already produced, in favour of the virtue and happiness of the human race;—these are objects worthy the interposition of God, objects beyond the reach of human understanding to discover, worthy the deepest attention of mankind. To effect an indifference about a discovery of such high importance, must argue a strange debility of understanding, or disingenuity of heart.

The circumstances of guilt, and depravity in which every ingenuous mind observes human nature involved, must produce very opposite sentiments of, and a different reception to, the Grace

26 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 3.

of the Gospel: But this may be the subject of another Letter, from

Your, &c.

LETTER III.

MADAM,

THAT the Gospel is an act of Grace, or indemnity to such as have violated the laws of God, is evident to all who have considered it with the least attention. And it is no less obvious, that the Grace of the Gospel will have the reception due to it from none, who are not conscious of being liable to condemnation. Is there one

one of the human race who finds himself upon such terms with his Maker, as place him above the necessity of having recourse to an act of Grace? If the testimony of conscience is admitted, if violence is not done to the witness and judge within us, if we do not employ the grossest artifice to delude ourselves, our own judgement will coincide with the law that condemns us.

But to self-condemnation, as to death, there is in human nature the utmost repugnance. To both all of us must sooner or later submit; against both, human nature struggles with all her force. To attempt an enumeration of the various

artifices by which men elide, palliate, lessen, or extinguish in themselves all sense of guilty would be difficult and tedious. If a man is not a consummate profligate, he will not quit the idea of moral worth; if he is not as abandoned as some of his neighbours, he will make a merit of that. If he is reputabile for certain good qualities or actions, though he is conscious of those that are essentially bad, he will not fail to settle the balance in his own favour. If he is irreproachable among men, and punctual in certain offices of Religion, though he persists in very criminal indulgences, of which he cannot be wholly ignorant, he will not hesitate to justify himself.

Why

Why do rational creatures thus grossly deceive themselves in a concern of infinite importance? Whence is it that every one, who examines what passes in his own mind, feels in some degree this propensity to impose upon himself? To the influence of self-love, the blindness induced by certain immoral habits, and our love of pleasure and aversion to pain, we must ascribe this unhappy propensity; but what merits our chief attention, is, that we are never completely deceived. At an invisible tribunal within, both evidence and judgement are against us. This bad men cannot wholly suppress, and good men do most readily acknowledge. The latter, though conscious of the purity

of their own intentions, and the general integrity of their conduct, are also conscious of failures and trespasses, for which they can plead no excuse; and on account of which they stand condemned; and, of course, gratefully embrace the Grace of the Gospel.

The use of sacrifices, almost universal, is a proof of the general sense of mankind upon this subject. By the recourse had to mediators, attonements, ablutions, by men of all nations, barbarous and civilized, they have in every age expressed their sense of guilt,—their boundless fears of punishment,—their sense of the divine purity and justice,—their persuasion, that their obedience could not entitle them to

to the divine favour,—and their hopes, that by these means, the Divinity would be appeased, and rendered propitious.

The declaration of ancient philosophers against the superstitious use of this mode of worship, does not weaken the force of this argument. For, as the ancient prophets reprehended the Jews for substituting sacrifices and purifications, instead of a moral character, so did the philosophers declaim against this abuse of them. These Rites they practised; they recommended them to the practice of others; they did both from a conviction of their propriety and usefulness: Though they could not trace their origin, nor fully comprehend

26 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 31

pretend their meaning; they practised them respectfully; not in obedience to the laws of their country only, but on the authority of remote tradition, held by them in high veneration.

To what cause then can we ascribe this remarkable concurrence of mankind in this mode of worship? Was it the immediate dictate of common sense? was it borrowed from the institutions of Moses? or was it the appointment of God to the first race of men? Whatever way we resolve it, the evidence is the same. A custom that so long and universally obtained among men, must necessarily correspond with the natural sentiments of mankind. Manners and cus-

tons founded in peculiar circumstances, modes of government, folk, or climate, will vary with their causes; but acts of Religion, reputed essential in all ages and countries, must derive their origin from some fixed cause. A sense of guilt, a feeling of the insufficiency of repentance and obedience, a persuasion of the placability of God, are essential to, and interwoven with, the frame of the human mind.

In contradiction to these natural sentiments of the human mind, men of parts employ all their acuteness in showing the impropriety of any interposition from Heaven, and the sufficiency in man to approve himself to God. The grace of the Gospel

28. *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 3.

pel, when first published, was received upon the most unquestionable evidence: - At this late period, many objections are framed to discredit it, by those who claim a superiority in intellectual merit. Nor are there wanting such as do not pretend to disbelieve, but totally neglect it. After all, we have no reason to be alarmed: Neither the malice of its foes nor the folly of its friends can prevail, to abolish the religion of Jesus. It hath maintained its empire in the hearts of the upright for ages past, in contradiction to all the efforts of power, and artifice, and will continue to diffuse its benign and salutary influences through all generations. The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

I am, Your, &c.

LETTER IV.

MADAM,

OUR inquiry merits
Y the utmost regard, and
cannot be resolved without a strict attention to the workings of the human mind. If the fears of mankind, arising from conscious guilt, are boundless, whence is it that so many despise the Grace of the Gospel? This contempt cannot arise from the natural judgement a man forms of his character and state, which is founded in sentiments of God, and

30 The Grace of the Gospel. Let. 4.

and his relation to him as his Creator, Sovereign, and Judge. For such sentiments must unavoidably produce an immediate feeling of the impossibility of our standing the trial of his rectitude and justice.

But many form an artificial judgement concerning themselves, which is founded in self-love. They resolve to think favourably of themselves, and suppress every tendency in their minds, towards a discovery of their real character. By these palliating arts, they cover, from their own view, the disorders of their hearts; and by every artifice, cherish their natural aversion to admit against themselves a sentence of condemnation.

Both

LET. 4. *The Grace of the Gospel.* 37

Both conscience and self-love are principles essential to man, but with each other they often are at variance.

But till a man is delivered from the illusions of self-love, and disposed to hear the voice, and submit to the decision, of conscience, he will not give a suitable reception to the Grace published in the Gospel. The humiliating doctrine of self-condemnation delivered by conscience, by the law of God, and by the Saviour of souls, must be admitted into, and penetrate his heart: For thus only can any man be prepared for the reception due to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

If

If a man should require the aid of an able physician, whilst he himself had no great apprehension of danger, together with an aversion from a regimen or painful cure; he will not easily be prevailed on to apply to the physician, or submit to his prescriptions: He will devise many objections, evade your reasons, elude your judgement, and baffle all your endeavours. But if you can bring him to discern the symptoms that threaten his life, he will immediately become tractable, and yield to your arguments. By this observation did our Saviour conduct his proposals to a distempered world. Happy had it been if the teachers of his religion had regulated their address to mankind

mankind by his example! Had they unfolded, to the view of all, the state of human nature, not by subtile reasonings upon doubtful facts, nor by vague declamation upon the evil of sin;—had they held up to the view of individuals their peculiar characters, by a comparison of their temper and life, with the standard of duty;—had they known how to make them sensible of their true situation, with their Sovereign and Judge;—were they possessed of the care, zeal, exactness, and judgment, which the importance of this subject requires;—fantastical notions of religion, and indifference about it, and cavils against it, had, by the blessing

D of

34 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 4:
of God, been banished from the
Christian Church.

The regard which men have for the health of their bodies, above what they entertain for their souls, is not so great as is generally supposed; they often betray an unreasonable neglect of both; often do they sacrifice both to a silly and unreasonable passion. For both most men have real concern, but they want wisdom and fortitude, by that concern, to regulate their conduct. The bulk of mankind are influenced by present views and inclinations; distant interests, spiritual and temporal, are generally disregarded; What then is the remedy? That which is distant must be brought near; that which is commonly neglected,

Let. 4. *The Grace of the Gospel.* 35

neglected, held up to their view. Their real character,—their internal disorders,—the sacrifices which conceal their deformities,—the light in which they appear before God,—must be placed immediately before their eyes, for not till then will they prize the Grace of the Gospel.

If a man is made to see his spiritual poverty and distress, he will embrace the riches of divine grace, with the eagerness of an indigent man who hath found a treasure. He who feels his spiritual distempers, will joyfully accept the assistance of the physician of souls. They who are convinced of the certainty and justice of the sentence of condemnation, pronounced by

D 2 con-

36 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 4.

conscience and the law of God, will receive the overtures of grace with transports, surpassing those which a pardon imparts to the man who has been condemned to die.

That skill, judgement, and a fervent zeal, may be imparted to those whose business it is to preach the word of reconciliation, so that they may present many perfect in Christ Jesus, is the prayer of,

Madam,

Your, &c.



LETTER

LETTER V.

O you, Madam, I have
T no occasion to expati-
ate on the amplitude
of the indemnity offered to
sinners; to penitent sinners, in
the gospel. It is without any
exception. In the most wise
and equitable administrations
among men, distinguished cri-
minals are excepted. In the
gospel all are invited, without
exception of any, not even the
most notorious offenders. Here
is grace transcending all that is
known among men, all that
could have entered into the

D 3 heart

38 *The Grate of the Gospel.* Let. 5.

heart of man to expect: The dignity of the divine government is supported in consistency with the impunity of the offender. The majesty of his administration is maintained, whilst his fatherly affection hath it's full exertion; access to God is opened for sinners, whilst satisfaction, the most ample, is made to the rigid demands of justice. All these grand purposes are fulfilled in Christ Jesus. The only Son of God, the brightness of the divine glory, the image of his person, bore the punishment of our sins, and in his person and sufferings exhibited to the world the most amazing, affecting, and alarming sense of guilt.

To this dispensation of sovereign wisdom, purity and love,
not

not professed philosophers only, but chiefly philosophical divines, have framed many objections. Had they known themselves, and their condition before God, they had not been so ingenious in finding out objections. A criminal is not accute in detecting informalities in his pardon. But are the doctrines of God to be submitted to the false philosophy of men? The judgement of philosophy ancient and modern, upon religion, abounds with the grossest absurdities.

Overlooking the face of nature, and the plainest notices of the being and attributes of God, philosophers have taught men to trace a mechanical connexion of causes and effects;

D 4 and

and have lost themselves and the truth, in a variety of hypotheses concerning the formation and government of the world. Not contented with the most explicit intimations of man's accountableness from his hopes and fears, his forecast and freedom, inseparable from the constitution of his mind, philosophers would penetrate into the essence of the human soul, and have introduced a scepticism on the subject of future existence: Overlooking the common practice both of societies and individuals, and their neglect and abuse of the powers of man. Philosophers have founded upon abstract ideas of power, a notion of self-sufficiency in man, that supersedes

the divine interposition in favour of virtue.

When God, by the preaching of the Gospel, interposed for a bewildered world, his gracious intention was, by philosophers, received with absolute contempt.

The appearance of twelve illiterate men, offering everlasting life in the name of One, who suffered an ignominious death; was, by them, treated as an object of ridicule and derision.

Twelve philosophers and orators, under the auspices of the Roman Emperor, promised better for the conversion of the world, in the opinion of the sages. But the event has proved that what appeared foolish to men, was the result of the most consummate

42. *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 5.

mate wisdom. Had the Gospel been propagated in conformity to the decisions of human wisdom, even good men could not have been secured against suspecting an imposture: But from the means that were used to propagate the gospel, and its triumphs over the prejudices of men, and the efforts of human policy and power, we see, to our unspeakable joy, that it came from God.

Can we now wonder that they who erred so egregiously in their speculations upon the truths of natural religion, and the judgment concerning the propagation of the gospel, should also object to the dispensation of grace, and be dissatisfied with the

the peculiar doctrines of the gospel?

When you look into the productions of philosophers antient and modern, do you not observe, in all their speculations on religion, an amazing ignorance of, or inattention to, the leading principles of human nature? Hence their exclamations against the idea of the interposition of the Son of God.—“If the Sovereign “of the world was disposed “to grant an act of grace to his “rebellious subjects, might not “his designs have been executed “in a more simple manner, “and with sufficient efficacy, “without the astonishing apparatus exhibited in the gospel?” But have mankind, in any period, been

been governed by abstract ideas? Is there any reason to think that they ever will be influenced by them? Men are rational creatures; but they are not pure intelligences; nor will they ever be determined by the reasons, fitness, or truth of things. They have sentiments of religion and virtue, of which they cannot be divested,—which our philosophers ought not to have overlooked. Why do our wise men regulate their judgement by arbitrary conjectures, rather than matters of fact? Why will men embrace ~~a~~ philosophy which makes to itself an ideal world; —forms to itself a visionary plan of government;—and finds fault with the real constitution of things?

Philosophers are offended with the manifestation of God in the flesh;—his making himself of no reputation,—his submitting to the sufferings of frail mortality,—his being made, not only by the injustice of man, but by the positive appointment of God, a dismal spectacle of the most cruel sufferings for the sake of guilty rebellious creatures. Philosophers are scandalized with the whole of this proceeding, through a defect, not a redundancy, of wisdom;—through an ignorance of, and inattention to, the constitution of the human mind;—through a criminal disregard of that grand maxim of good government, That all it's subjects be formed

46 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 5.
formed and managed by their leading principles.

God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of Christ! — The wise and gracious appointment of him who formed the human frame, and knows what is in man; as it is kindly adapted to the principles in the human mind, may it touch every spring of action in our hearts. In the cross of Christ, and in embracing it in all its infamies, may we discern a glory and greatness, before which, all human grandeur disappears, as the stars do before the splendour of the rising sun. I have the honour to be,
Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VI.

MADAM,

FROM the slightest survey of the history of human nature we learn, that the mind of man, conscious of it's own weakness, impatient of abstract thinking, and sensible of it's inability to support spiritual contemplation, hath continued to desire a visible exhibition of the Deity. Impressed with a feeling of defect, and imperfection before God, men have had recourse to the mediation of subordinate divinities.

48 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 6.

nities. Conscious of their demerit, on account of many violations of the divine law, and convinced of the guilt of having insulted the authority of the supreme Lord of all, they have betaken themselves to atonements by blood, and have found themselves at a loss to discover a sacrifice adequate to the purposes of expiation. Is not then the gospel highly worthy all acceptance, when we consider its perfect coincidence with the undisguised sentiments of human nature, and the perfect ideas of the divine perfections? Have they any perception of the wisdom and goodness of administration, who prefer to it the chimerical ideas of speculative men?

The

The dispensation of grace in the gospel hath no reference to philosophy. It came not from the schools. It submits not to the judgement of the learned. It originated from him who formed the heart of man, knows it's various movements, and hath addressed it to the perception and immediate judgement natural to the soul. He hath designed it, not to exercise the heads of the curious, but the hearts of the simple; not to gratify a vain petulant fantastical spirit of investigation, but to improve the heart, and direct the practice.

Must not every man possessed of the common feelings of humanity, experience an encouraging

E hope

50 *The Grace of the Gospels.* Let. 61

hope in approaching God through the mediation of his Son? Doth not his own relation to the Mediator animate him? Does not the dignity of Him, in whose name he applies to God, invigorate his soul? From his trust in the merit of him in whom the Father is well pleased, doth he not derive boldness of access to the throne of the Divine Majesty? Can any man who hath formed proper sentiments of God, derive such encouragement in his addresses to him, from a consciousness of his own integrity, the rectitude of his own intentions, or the merit of his own good services, without the intervention of such a Mediator? Are not the death and sufferings of God's incarnate Son, which

he underwent in obedience to his father, for expiating the guilt of mankind; together with God's acceptance of his atonement, declared by raising him from the dead, incomparably the most significant and affecting expressions of the good-will of God towards men? Here is a declaration not of his placability only, but also of his anxious concern for their welfare, and his earnest desire to receive them into his favour.

It ought not, indeed, to be dissembled that this awful dispensation must produce in the hearts of those who are seriously affected by it, the most painful compunction mingled with terror and grief. But history and

52 *The Grace of the Gospel.* Let. 6.

common observation unite in assuring us that the sufferings of a crucified Saviour, with his entering into the holy place, as the High Priest of our profession, there to appear in the presence of God for us, form the most powerful attractives to the love and obedience of God, that wisdom can devise.

If still it is inquired what account can we make of this wonderful dispensation of grace? The answer is obvious. We cannot, in our present state, comprehend the œconomy of the Divine government. Children do not comprehend the designs of their parents; nor do subjects always penetrate into the mysteries of civil administration.

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This however we know, that the method of grace through Christ Jesus corresponds exactly with the sentiments of human nature;—conveys to the mind the most sublime, amiable, and awful ideas of the divine perfections,—forms the most cogent incentives to the practice of our duty,—and contributes most effectually to the honour and happiness of our nature.

With the warmest gratitude may we aquiesce in the Divine appointment, resign our souls to the influence of the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and voluntarily surrender ourselves, with all our spiritual interests to him, who is able to keep that which

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54 *Men receive Grace* Let. 7.

we commit unto him, unto the
day of the Lord.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER VII.

MADAM,

T would avail us little
I to be acquainted fully
with the grace of God
to men, if we were not also in-
formed of the various degrees
in which mankind are partakers
of it, according to the diversi-
ties of their character and con-
duct. The gospel contains a
plain

plain and full account of this important subject. What pity is it! that an amazing confusion of ideas and opposition of sentiments among divines, have darkened and perplexed the minds of men, in reference to what all ought to know with the utmost precision. Those who teach religion to mankind, ought to be possessed of a thorough knowledge of human nature, and of a sound judgement, uncorrupted by artificial systems. But when we recollect the origin of the controversies of divines, and the spirit by which they have been conducted, we cannot help being sensible that they who have taken the lead, have not been eminent for these qualifications, and that their dis-

putes ought to be resolved into causes not strictly connected with the investigation of truth.

But the refinements of the learned, and the prejudices of the ignorant, may be surmounted by a due attention to a very few simple and obvious truths. That God will on no consideration vouchsafe his special favour to a bad man, is an obvious truth, which will be denied by none who are not corrupted by artifice. And that God, in consideration of the meritorious obedience of his beloved Son, bestows favours on sinners, which, in consistency with the rectitude of his government, they could not otherwise have expected, is another truth level

to the meanest capacity, and will be admitted by all who are not corrupted by learning. By the help of these simple propositions, we may arrive at that knowledge of this subject, which is necessary to the conduct of life. Need I detain you by an illustration of what is so plainly revealed?

Let me suppose a man possessed of many amiable qualities, good and even sublime sentiments, and whose conduct is generally regular; but who habitually prefers his ease or pleasure, or interest, or reputation, the gratification of any passion whatsoever, to the duty he owes to God:—He is a bad man in the judgement of his own conscience,

science, and in the sight of God. He hath no reason to think that God will rank him among his friends. Men of imperfect virtue may be good members of society; and all its privileges, as well as the respect of its members, are due to them. But to be qualified for the friendship of God, requires an entire virtue. An agreement of dispositions and inclinations with regard to what is mutually considered to be their *chief* interest, is essential to friendship. An entire surrender of all interests and inclinations to the interests of virtue, is indispensable to the union of the soul with God. In our friends we overlook imperfections and failings, but infidelity dissolveth the closest connections.

nections. The husband bears every other failing in his wife; but will not tolerate her bestowing her affections to another. Religion admits not of our giving to any interest whatever a preference to duty. He who is conscious of sacrificing his duty to any wrong inclination, cannot be in favour with God. Nor ought any man to consider himself as an object of that affection which God hath for good men, who doth not continually endeavour to sacrifice his own inclinations to God and his duty. This is the import of the commands, counsels, admonitions, promises, threatenings,—of the whole revelation of God. This is the dictate of the Gospel, of Reason, of Common Sense; and such

such as comply not with it, are disqualified for the kingdom of God.

I ought to beg your forgiveness for having detained you in the illustration of what to you will appear self-evident. In the same light it will be seen by every one who regards truth as the most sacred interest of man: But how disagreeable is the reflection that many, of most amiable dispositions, are intangled in the snares prepared for them by the disputes of Divines. On their account, I hope you will have the goodness to forgive this trespass on your patience, reluctantly committed by

Your, &c,

LETTER VIII.

MADAM,

ILTHOUGH a bad man cannot be the object of the special favour of God, he may receive many benefits from the Divine bounty, to which he hath no title. The distinction between the love of benevolence and the love of complacency is founded in nature; a wise and good man will admit none but the wife and virtuous into his friendship, but his benevolence extends to all. A wise and virtuous Prince
will

will not make favourites of the worthless, nor bestow upon them places of importance, but his kind regards and good offices will extend to all the subjects of his government. A good father may withdraw his countenance from his undutiful son, and even expel him his house; but he will retain a strong inclination to receive him, on his return to his duty;—he will take measures for his recovering the privileges he hath forfeited;—his bowels may be tenderly moved towards him;—he will do for his recovery all that can be done in any consistency with the dignity of his own character, and the honour and interest of his family. And will not the father of all who *alone* is good, do this and more

more, if possible, for his undutiful children? All are the objects of his tender compassion: All participate the effects of his fatherly affection. And how superior soever the favours may appear which are conferred on some, compared with those bestowed upon others, by such as attentively consider their nature and tendency, the difference will be found more in appearance than reality.

Let the most worthless among men look back on the past, and consider the present circumstances of his life; let him survey his thoughts, his past and present views of things, and, whilst he condemns himself, he must confess the unmerited bounty of his

his heavenly Father. Let the same person resolve to comply with the kind intention of the external and internal dispensations of grace, with which he is favoured, and, of the goodness of God, he will have renewed experience. We forget, overlook, and counteract, the dispensations of divine mercy; but God is continually employing various methods for conducting us to good; and upon our dutiful compliance, he makes further and proportioned communications of his grace.

There is some wit, and also some truth, in the celebrated saying, that, “The moral actions of unregenerated men are but splendid vices.” Every man must

must act from the principles of which he is possessed. If a man doth not love God with all his heart, his prayers and his alms cannot flow from that principle. If he is influenced by self-love, or the dread of misery, and the desire of happiness, his best actions must be resolved into that principle, and therefore contain no moral worth. But to conclude from thence, that they were wholly disregarded by God is unwarrantable. Most certainly such actions, performed by undutiful children, are not overlooked by their parents. They rejoice to hear that the prodigal feels for himself, and minds his own interest: They hope he shall acquire better dispositions and nobler

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principles, and do contribute their utmost to forward the intended change. These are the dispositions of our fathers on earth, and shall we expect less of our Father in Heaven? Such natural sentiments of God's paternal care ought not to be sacrificed to quaint sayings and metaphysical subtleties. Let no modes of reasoning prevail against sentiments dictated by nature, strengthened by revelation, and confirmed by experience.

The foot of Jacob's ladder rested upon the earth, the top reached the heavens; such is the scale of virtue;—such the constitution of God. Under the direction and influence of him who

who first established this gradation, we rise from step to step, till we arrive at that pitch of moral perfection, for which we were originally designed. Having, by the help of God, surmounted the difficulties of one step, we are the better prepared to undertake those of another: And if difficulties and dangers seem to increase as we advance, so also will our supports and aids; our joys, and triumphs. The noble ambition of ascending to dignity and glory, will communicate delights to the soul, which prove a counterpoise to all discouragements.

Abstract reasoners, and such as delight in the marvellous, overlook this gradation; but

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attentive observers of the true state of things know it to be the appointment of God. And in it there is one, and but one difficulty:—The difficulty of actually pursuing those measures, that might reasonably be expected from the meanest of the human kind. To superficial thinkers this will appear no difficulty. They who found their judgement upon possibilities;—they who take it for granted that men *will* do what they can do;—who think that men will perform what they are convinced is fit and necessary; — who imagine that men will conform their practice to their moral obligations;—all such will see no difficulty in this subject. But if we attentively consider the common

common practice of mankind; nay, if we observe the conduct of any one individual; we will perceive that so great is the difficulty, as to admit only of *one* solution. The œconomy of Grace displayed in the Gospel; and this, alone, can resolve it to satisfaction.

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Your, &c.

L E T T E R IX.

M A D A M,

O errors are more fatal
N to the interests of Chrif-
tianity, than those par-
tial and unskilful representations

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which have been made of the dispensation of Grace in the Gospel. By them mistakes and misunderstandings have been produced among the learned,—the ignorant have been misled,—bigotry hath had full scope;—and such as are adverse to religion have unnecessarily been disgusted. The Father of mercies, in the Gospel, appears willing to be reconciled to his undutiful children;—so desirous of reconciliation, as to appoint his only Son to expiate their guilt;—and so anxious to perfect them in holiness, as to employ every power, compatible with human nature, to win them over to their duty and their happiness. Therefore, to exhibit the Grace of God upon conditions to be performed

performed by them, and practicable by all, but which will not be fulfilled by any, must be of most pernicious tendency.

That the spirit of the dispensation of Grace rises far above such partial and contracted representations, is evident from the face of Revelation. " This is the Covenant I will make with them, saith the Lord; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and a new heart will I give them; I will put my fear into their hearts, and write my laws in their inward parts; I will put my Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in my ways." Here the Spirit of Divine Grace is explicitly declared: Into his

own hands he takes the work of Grace. He leaves it not to men's choice whether they will accept it or not,—he passes over their unjust and unworthy behaviour,—he employs those means which are most proper for recovering them to their duty, and reconciling them to himself. In this light, the Grace of God shines forth illustriously glorious. It's glory was withheld from the wisest among the ancients; nor was it conspicuous to that people who were heretofore most highly favoured of God. It was reserved to the Son of God, not only to purchase life for men, but to plead with them to accept of it; and to promise, and at length to send forth, his Divine Spirit;—to supply the want of his

his personal presence;—to address the human mind in the most intimate manner;—to lead men into all Truth;—to operate on their hearts;—and to guide their lives in the paths of righteousness.

Before the publication of the Gofpel, the best men had but faint ideas of our having an High Priest over the house of God, in whose name we may come boldly to a throne of Grace, and find mercy, and obtain grace, to help us in the time of need. Good men indeed, in all ages, have addressed their prayers to God. But that bad men, most abdurate offenders, are authorised to ask and expect that God should produce in them a total change of temper

temper and life, is the peculiar glory of the Christian dispensation.

The worst man who is desirous of becoming better, he who is alienated from God, but ambitious of being in a state of favour with him, may apply for divine grace with certainty of success *. He cannot expect that God will receive him immediately into his favour. But he may freely ask, and he will certainly obtain direction and aid, to dispose and enable him to repent and reconcile his practice to his duty.

* Simon Magnus is exhorted to pray to God.

Upon

Upon the invitation and promises of God, we may depend for every spiritual blessing, without exception or limitation;—that only excepted which must always be understood, that he will not force our will. The change of temper produced by the agency of the divine Spirit, is accomplished in exact conformity to the nature he hath given us, and without the least infringement of it's laws. Liberty is essential to man. It is a part of that constitution with which he was originally formed. If he should be deprived of Liberty, he would no longer belong to the human species;—no longer be accountable for his actions,—no longer be a subject of moral government,—no longer be a subject of the kingdom

of Christ. Moral agents only are capable of moral government. The subjects of Christ are so of choice,—they are a *willing people*. The original constitution of human nature is preserved inviolate in regeneration. He conducts us as reasonable creatures to that perfection for which we were designed. How much soever the learned have differed as to other points, about this, there neither is, nor can be, any diversity of opinion.

To engage your attention to points of controversy, is altogether inconsistent with my design: But lest it be suspected that good men differ on this subject, I shall conclude this letter with a short account of the opinions of Divines,

Divines, respecting the moral liberty of man, which you may peruse or not; for to you it can be of no importance. Permit me only to observe to you, that the opinions of Calvin are not generally known; such only as have studied his Commentaries on the Epistles, can form a true judgement of the sentiments of this great man. He wrote his Institutions when he was very young, his blood-warm, and his notions high. But when he wrote upon the Epistles, his sentiments of Truth were moderate, rational, and very different from what he composed at the age of Five and Twenty.

Those who believe an absolute decree of election to eternal life

life in favour of the Elect, do affirm an operation of God, which makes the conversion of the number elected absolutely certain; but not such an operation as forces their wills, or makes any infringement of their liberty of acting as rational agents, or subjects of moral government. They admit that the Divine operation may be resisted, and actually is resisted, in many instances; and only contend for the continuance of such operations on the elect; and the elected number being at last effectually prevailed on to give up their resistance, and conform themselves to the divine will. They further contend, what no philosopher can deny; that there is a certain moment

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in which the change is completed, as there is a certain scarcely perceptible line of difference, by which the colours of shades are distinguished. On this account, they call the conversion of a sinner instantaneous; but they agree with others about the preparatory steps commonly taken in producing the change. The only difference among Divines, on this subject, is, Whether the certainty of the event is reconcilable with the freedom of man's choice?—A question, which might be soon and easily discussed by exercising sobriety of mind, and candour in judgement. Rash declarations, on both sides, have injured the cause of Truth. Some talk so earnestly upon the part
we

we ourselves act in the acquisition of the virtuous character, as to leave little room for the supposition of the Divine agency. Others use such terms, in insisting on the necessity of the Divine agency, as to leave no part for us, but to expect, and to believe. And, as frequently happens to inconsiderate speakers, they not only run contrary to one another, but often contradict themselves, when, after all, there can be no very considerable difference in judgement. Happy were it if men of learning and unbiassed judgement, would explain this Doctrine, with such consistency of thought and expression, as to prevent, for the future, the disgrace of Religion,
and

Let. 9. in Various Measures. - 81

and the detriment of well-disposed Christians.

You desire a minute and precise account of the Doctrine of Regeneration, Conversion, and Sanctification. It is of importance that your injunctions on this subject be executed with perspicuity, and all possible simplicity. I enter upon it with diffidence; but have no doubt of your judging with your usual candour concerning this, and every other attempt to prove that attachment, with which I have the honour to be,

Madam,

Your, &c.

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LET.

LETTER X.**M A D A M,**

In that capital object of the dispensation of Grace, the renovation of man's heart, there is an astonishing diversity of operations. In every case, the effect is complete, for a new nature is imparted; but in the kinds, and order of the means, by which that change is produced, there is a countless variety. Of all the possible methods, within the compass of infinite power and wisdom, the good Shepherd adopts

dopts sometimes one, sometimes another, for restoring to his fold those for whom he laid down his life. This demonstrates the sovereignty and efficacy of the divine choice, and, at the same time, administers a solemn caution to those who embark in the difficult enterprize of rendering intelligible, to the unexperienced, a subject so complex. The Spirit bloweth where it listeth. Therefore to prescribe and apply the same rules indiscriminately, to every case, were presumptuous. This theme hath furnished Libertines with ample scope for ridicule, and hath disfigured the labours of those Divines, who, with more warmth than candour, have made it a topic of disputation.

Easy it were to give a systematic account of the rise and progress of religion in the passive mind, irresistibly influenced by divine power. / Nor would it be difficult to explain how a bad man, endowed with high moral powers, could render himself very good. Systems are often framed without difficulty. Theories may, with ease, be rendered plausible. But to frame our ideas in an exact conformity to the inspired writings, and to admit none that will not bear to be tried by the standard of common sense, hath not always been executed. The agency of God, and the liberty essential to man, are ideas that ought to enter into every sentiment expressed upon this subject.

In the Kingdom of Grace, as of providence, miracles and wonders have been wrought. Nor is there any thing more common or natural, than for a pious soul, replete with gratitude for the work of Grace upon his heart, to ascribe his conversion to a marvellous effort of almighty power. Nor, in a limited sense, is he deceived. But it had been more adviseable to reserve the subjects of such publications, for devotional exercises in private, than to circulate them as objects of the public attention. The weak have been misled, and by others religion has been made an object of derision. The ordinary administration of Grace, that is, the subject of the experience of
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good men, and the object of the hopes of those that desire to be good,—in which all are deeply concerned;—and which will be carefully investigated by all who have any serious concern for their most essential interests,—what hath been involved in mystery, and observed by artificial learning, but what ought to lye open to the plainest understanding, and be rendered obvious to common sense;—this will be most acceptable to you, and most useful to others; and to this will I confine my inquiries. I have no occasion to recapitulate what must be allowed upon this subject, and I have already considered,—the lapsed and guilty state of human nature; — the mediation, atonement,

ment, and intercession of the Son of God;—his administration of the Kingdom of Righteousness; the discipline of his providence;—the external institutions of religion,—and, most especially, the internal operations of that divine agent, whom he promised to his Church before his ascension, and sent down from Heaven to remain among men; by whom he fulfills all the good pleasure of his goodness, and trains them to perfection and Glory.

More tender than the feelings of your warmest friend, are the compassions of this divine Person.—More sincere than those of the most affectionate father, are his endeavours to promote

our most essential interests;— more skilful than those of the most experienced Tutor, are his watchful cares to train the children of men to virtue, and to happiness. His kind concern for each individual is the same, as if but one object of his tuition, only, existed among the race of men. Allusions fall infinitely short of that infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, with which this omniscient and omnipresent friend of mankind executes his office of sanctifier, applies the blessings purchased by the Redeemer, and qualifieth us for the fruition of the sublimest objects.

The first and most important object of human wisdom, is the know-

knowledge that every man ought to have of himself; nor is any branch of science acquired with more difficulty. Therefore it is an uncommon acquisition. But it is here that the government of the divine Spirit begins,

To surmount the obstructions to our arriving at an acquaintance with our real character and state, is one of the most arduous parts of our work. The pride of men, their prejudices, with the whole train of selfish passions, oppose the discovery. The various artifices, subterfuges, and palliating arts, unite in disfiguring, and concealing from our view, those ingredients in the composition of our temper and life, which, in themselves, are vile and detestable. No bad man could

could endure the sight of the deformity and wretchedness of his heart; and, therefore, they are covered up by those dishonest artifices, which nourish and protect them. And when, by any means, these have been suddenly removed, and the corruptions of the heart and life have stood forth, in all their inordinate ness, to the view of the mind, the horror of the prospect hath overwhelmed the soul, and unhinged all it's powers.

I Therefore the Holy Spirit, the great Author and Fountain of light, with infinite skill, conveys to the mind of the sinner, such measures of light and information, as are peculiarly adapted to his state. Such discoveries

coveries are made to him, as are calculated to alarm his fears, and work on the springs of action in his heart. Who that maintains any intercourse with his own Soul, does not recollect the introduction of light into his mind, at certain seasons, of which he cannot otherways make any rational account, but that it proceeded immediately from the Father of Light. A perverse interpretation of this sentiment, as enthusiastical, will be the reception it is to meet with from Libertines. But I appeal to the candid and judicious, who are accustomed to recollect what passes in their own minds concerning this fact. In the days of their prosperity, when their hearts were elated with

with the bounties of heaven,— often in the days of darkness, when the heart is mollified by distress,— by means of some Divine Truth, often perhaps heard, but never before regarded;—by means of some religious exercise, often indeed performed, but hitherto performed to no effect.—Or, perhaps, without any other means than the immediate emanation of light, from it's fountain into the heart, an alarming prospect of internal disorder, pollution, and guilt, hath been opened to their view. Nor can any, who are strangers to such a prospect, conceive the confusion and distress, that must be the effect of such a disorder.

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We cannot look upon the deformities of vice in any person without disgust. In a friend we discover them with regret, and grief. What must he suffer who beholds, in his own heart, a swarm of mean, impure, and ruinous passions, which had been hitherto hid from his observation, by means of those artifices which now strike him with horror?

From a prospect so shocking, the sinner may now turn away his mind;—divert his attention to different objects;—fly to the amusements, the cares, or the bustle, of life;—and find relief in one or more of the composing artifices, which had so long maintained his peace. But if he

94 *Regeneration.* Let. 10.

he persists in using this expedient, he is undone, and there is no remedy.

On the contrary, if he will submit to be conducted by his Divine guide, he must, thro' pain, and suffering, arrive at truth and tranquillity. Support under the anguish of his heart, will be afforded him. His pains will be mitigated, and his griefs allayed, by the assurances now given him, that, by the exercise of patience, and the resignation of himself, to the conduct of his Leader, his affairs shall be retrieved. The disorders and miseries within, he will be directed to regard with the strictest attention. Upon this scene of internal deformity, his eyes must

must now be fixed; and, though melancholy and distressful, he will, from it, make such particular discoveries, as will greatly facilitate his reformation. The glories of the dispensation of Grace, will now be revealed to his soul; and He who brings order out of confusion, will direct and enable him to improve the information, and the comfort with which he has been favoured.

The dissipated Libertine is, by his friend, reconciled to the mortification of looking into the state of his disordered affairs. He is shocked and confounded, when he finds reason to apprehend that he is ruined. And if, regardless of the intreaties of his friend,

friend, who would still inspire him with hope, he will relieve himself from his present vexation, by recurring to his accustomed profligacy, he is a wretch indeed ! But if he has the fortitude to bear his present distress, and wisdom to prosecute the plan proposed by his judicious friend, he will soon taste the satisfaction of knowing that his affairs will be retrieved. That the light issuing from the Sun of righteousness may penetrate the hearts of the present unthinking, and frivolous generation, is the fervent and constant prayer, of

Madam,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

MADAM,

O superficial thinkers, it may occur that the representation given of the disorders and distresses of the convert, upon the first admission of light into his mind, is applicable only to such as have been long inured to habits of vice. Nor can it be denied, that remorse for past crimes, and the darkness, extreme corruption, and impurity, induced by habitual wickedness, must heighten his horrour, and add to the diffi-

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difficulties of his reformation. It must also be allowed that youth, flexible, and apt to be drawn by the cords of Love, are often attracted by such imperceptible degrees, with so little uneasiness and so much affection, that their pains find more than a counterpoise, in the serenity and satisfaction which prevail in the issue. Concerning certain gentle natures, trained early to virtue, and inured to the habits of religious exercises, favoured with good examples, and retained in the society of the excellent, endued with sweet tempers and amiable dispositions, to whom the inestimable privilege of education hath been blessed by God; concerning such it may be said,

said, that they are sanctified from the womb, and that, very early, the Divine Spirit hath taken up his residence in their hearts. And to all who judiciously observe human nature, it will occur, that, in the moral as well as in the natural world, there is an amazing variety, and that the trials of virtue are infinitely diversified.

But notwithstanding every concession that can be admitted by an intelligent observer of the present state of human nature; it's depravity, and the miseries of a state of condemnation, lay a wide and deep foundation for all the pain suffered by the convert, upon the first admission of light into his mind.

Nor can his distress admit of any mitigation, but from the dispensation of the Grace of the Gospel. Here the indemnity published by the Son of God, and the method of rectifying internal disorders, are presented to his view, and operate no less powerfully upon the hopes, than the preceding discoveries had done upon the fears of the convert.

With a heart, whereof the most powerful springs of action are skilfully touched, he now applies himself to the grand business of life,—to cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. The work of purifying the heart, is equalled in it's importance only by it's

it's difficulty. Greater torment humanity cannot, perhaps, endure, than to prevail against the force of habit, and subdue those passions, of which the exorbitance hath become natural. To a selfish man, to discover the wretched condition of his own heart;—to a proud man, the weakness and meanness of his mind;—to the voluptuary, the debasement and degradation of his soul,—is beyond belief mortifying. What then must he suffer, who is engaged in a struggle with these unhallowed but domineering propensities, before he has made some proficiency in the blessed art of controuling them?

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But

But amidst all his conflicts, he is graciously supported, strengthened to bear his pains, and directed and urged on by the good Spirit, who has begun in him his good work. The light imparted to his mind, communicates not direction only, but life, joy, and vigour: He goes on from strength to strength, from one degree of solid and sublime satisfaction to another, proportioned to the ardour and steadiness of his endeavours.

To you, Madam, I have no occasion to illustrate this period of conversion, by a comparison of the life of a real Christian, with that of him who only assumes that title. You know their pleasures are different, and so

so also are their pains. The latter contented with keeping free from gross vice, and performing the external duties of religion, without attempting the purification of his heart, contemplates his outside regularity, with an ostentatious satisfaction. But he knows nothing of the exquisite satisfaction of subduing one corrupt affection. One instance of victory, over one inordinate passion, whether covetousness, envy, or vain glory, is worth all the joys of hypocrites. It is purchased with pain; but a pain that is succeeded by some degrees of that pleasure, which the Scripture calls unspeakable, and full of glory.

Mortifying, doubtless, it must be to a man, who hath been well persuaded of his own integrity;—seldom questioned his own candour and probity;—was flattered and carressed by a beloved party;—swelled with the applause of such as held his person in admiration;—strangely mortifying to him it must be, to see within himself a swarm of irregular affections;—to be convinced that he had no claim to the character of an honest man;—to feel that God detests him; and, if he were known, all good men would avoid him;—to find himself under the necessity of changing the former plan of his conduct;—to be obliged to abandon his usual train of thinking;—to unravel

all that is past;—to travel in a dark, rugged, steep, and, by him, a hitherto unfrequented path;—to do himself violence; — to undo inveterate habits, and acquire the opposite qualities.— This, it must be confessed, is self-renunciation, self-denial, the crucifixion of the old man.

But happy is the man that will submit to it! for to him belongs the satisfaction of having escaped from seduction, darkness, and delusion;—escaped the wrath to come:—of conciliating, thro' Christ Jesus, the favour of God,—and winning a crown of righteousness. To him belongs the consciousness of being delivered from the power of his enemies;—of being directed by unerring

unerring truth;—conducted by infallible wisdom, and secured from folly and fatal errors, by him who has said, “I will never ‘leave thee nor forsake thee,’” who hath commanded us to abide in him, and promised that he will abide in us; and he being in us, who can be against us?

In this period of the spiritual life, the principle of Divine love, shed abroad in the Soul, by the views already given of Grace through Christ Jesus, is strengthened, and acquires stability. This liberal and generous principle of holiness, which centres the soul in God, acquires vigour and increase by the communications of the Divine Spirit. By the light, support,
and

and aid, continually imparted to the soul, those pious emotions, and devout, and grateful affections which promote and establish our union with God, through the Redeemer, acquire the ascendant in the heart, and diffuse their benign influences over all the powers and faculties of the mind. Like the union of congenial souls, knit together in friendship, our union with Christ, and attachment to him, acquires steadiness, power, and consistency, by a reciprocation of benefits from him, and of grateful returns of affection from us. I have the honour to be,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

MADAM,

W^HOEVER has experienced the progress of reformation in his own temper and conduct, will be conscious of many devious practices, perverse passions, with approaches toward an obstinate resistance of Divine Grace. In a higher or lower degree, and in too many instances, all are guilty in this respect. Froward children try the patience and perseverance of their Tutors. But if the latter know their business,

siness, they will, by skill and address, by blandishments and corrections, reconcile them to their duty. A father, of judgement and bowels, will not, for every act of disobedience, abandon his undutiful Son. Far less will our Heavenly Father easily give up the objects of his paternal affection. His Spirit strives with their perverseness; and, by the discipline of his providence, by his general and particular admonitions, together with those special discoveries, he imparts; they are restored to the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

That every thing in human nature is precarious, which hath not been established by the force
of

of habit, is a trite observation. Certain it is, that till the habit of holiness is attained by the convert to religion, he will consider his state as dangerous, his comforts will be broken, the power of sin will operate to the prejudice of his satisfactions; nor will his peace acquire any stability, till the bias of his mind is in favour of truth, till the religious principle is compleatly formed, and his will is resolved into the will of God.

This happy frame of spirit is produced in the subjects of Divine Grace, by their constant care to follow the light, and comply with the direction and guidance of Supreme Wisdom.

Especi-

Especially are they distinguished by the proficiency they make in an acquaintance with themselves. Unenlightened minds are blind to those blemishes and errors in themselves, which to others are obvious. They are under the influence of artifices, which disguise and nourish what, if exposed to their own view, they would detest, and quickly abandon. Such as are taught of God see, and therefore avoid, the errors and follies which, by the palliating arts are disguised in others; and acquire that habit of wisdom, which gives a harmony to their affections; an uniformity to their conduct; an unity to their lives. Self-deceived men varnish the blind impulse
of

of their passions, by the artificial glosses of a corrupted heart. The clearest discoveries they render hurtful to themselves, like those diseased constitutions which turn wholesome food into what is pernicious. But the children of light improve every Truth, to rectify remaining disorders, correct their ideas, refine their natures, and perfect their souls.

As wisdom is more excellent than folly; as improvements in virtue are infinitely preferable to all the gratifications of sense; as our making the nearest possible approaches to the Source of Excellence, is of more value than all the acquisitions of a false deceitful heart; such and so great is

is the difference betwixt the state of one who is governed by truth, and him that is bewildered by falsehood. The latter, influenced by the illusions of self-deceit, is the sport of interfering passions. To his vices he affixes the names of virtues. His life is embarrassed, coarse, patched, and irregular, without unity or proportion. The former sees things in their proper light, therefore in the several parts of his conduct, there is a well-proportioned union, delightful to himself, amiable among men, acceptable to God. By the light that cometh from above, he is led in the high way, which is called "the way of Holiness," in which the farther he advanceth, he moves with the

greater ease; and, though his perfection is reserved for another state, he attains, even in this life, that facility and readiness in the duties of Religion and Righteousness, which gives him an earnest of the unconceivable joy he shall feel, when his soul, unmolested by discordant passions, shall move in exact conformity to the dictates of truth.

“ The commandment of God is exceedingly broad,” and the discoveries of inward and outward disorders will be in proportion to our advances in purity of heart, and in godly conversation. The ascent of the mount is steep and slippery, and becomes still more so, the nearer we approach

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the summit*. This, however, is certain, that the more you balk your corrupt inclinations, the fewer demands they will make;—The more you habituate yourself to difficult duties, so much the easier will they become;—the fewer instances in which you

* To affirm that, in proportion to the convert's progress in holiness, his work will become more and more difficult, were to suggest a fatal discouragement to diligence and perseverance in well-doing. But the Author presumes, the experience of the faithful in every age will justify the observation, "That, after considerable improvements in the divine life, the new discovery of maladies in the heart, and of errors in the conduct, till then unperceived, will be a source of renewed humiliation, and self-abhorrence." The traveller, now near the end of his journey, apprised of considerable deviations from the right path, must consider the necessity of retrieving such mistakes as an obstruction in his progress. David having contemplated the perfection of the Divine Law, and compared his inward frame, and outward deportment, with that sublime standard of rectitude, expresses the feelings of a tender and awakened conscience: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

have recourse to artifice, the more uprightly will you determine concerning Sin and Duty. If we yield ourselves up to the government of conscience and the good Spirit,—make Truth the ruling object of our hearts,—and follow the light without limitation or reserve, we shall gradually prevail over the seductions of passion;—be delivered from the embarrassments of error, and advance towards an union with simple, universal, uncreated Truth.

To what pitch of perfection those who commit themselves to the gracious conduct of the Divine Spirit, may arrive in this state, is difficult to determine. Our improvements will bear a direct

direct proportion to our admission of, and compliance with, the Truth. When we think of the illustrious names recorded with honour in the holy Scripture, we must prefer their state, with all their calamities and distresses, to the condition of triumphant wickedness.

Who is not ambitious to be what the great Apostle to the Gentiles was? When forewarned of sufferings from which frail humanity could not but recoil, he could say to his friends, “What do you mean, to weep, “and break my heart? I am “ready not to be bound only, “but to suffer death, for the “name of the Lord Jesus!” And to his enemies, “Would

I 3 “to

“ to God, ye were not only
“ almost, but altogether such
“ as I am, save these bonds!—
“ I know in whom I have be-
“ lieved, and am persuaded that
“ he is able to keep that which
“ I have committed to him, to
“ the day of the Lord.” We
emulate the state of Job, with
all his sorrows, when we
hear him exclaim, “Till I die,
“ I will not remove mine inte-
“ grity from me; my righteous-
“ ness I will hold fast, and will
“ not let it go; my heart shall
“ not reproach me, so long as
“ I shall live. I know that my
“ Redeemer liveth, and that he
“ shall stand on the earth at the
“ latter day; and though the
“ worms consume this body,
“ yet,

" yet, in my flesh, I shall see
" God."

Encompassed with a cloud of witnesses, may we run the race set before us, looking to the Author and Finisher of our faith.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XIII.

MADAM,

THE sublime virtues of
THE ancient saints, and of
the illustrious few, who
still continue to dignify human
nature, will kindle in the ingenuous
mind a generous ambition,

to rise to the perfection of the Christian. To perfect holiness, is our work on earth. The perfect example of the Son of God, is the standard according to which our character should be regulated: To be perfect, as our Father in Heaven is perfect, is proposed as the ultimate object of our hearts.

An union with the Father of Lights, in a state of felicity and perfection, is, in the Gospel, proposed to our hopes, as the most successful excitement to the ~~as~~ purification of the heart, under the direction and government of the Spirit of Truth. Here we are assured, that, when we shall emerge from this scene of depression and disorder, and escape from those dark

dark prisons, in which our immortal souls are confined, we shall enter into the regions of light, converse with the spirits of just men made perfect, and see, and enjoy, in the most intimate communion, the exhaustless fountain of truth and bliss.—But this exceeds description, and far surpasses all the heart of man can conceive.

— “Light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun.” Even the material light of that heavenly luminary, which quickens and enlivens our visible system, gives great delight to the mind, by the intervention of our bodily organs. But this is no more than a very faint image of that incomprehensible

kenible happiness, which consists in the full and eternal enjoyment of that uncreated Light, which, proceeding from it's original Source, shall shine upon holy souls without the medium of a material sun, or eyes of flesh. He is debased and degenerated indeed, who feels no delight in the entertainment of truth. Speculative truths give delight to a mind capable of relishing them; a delight far beyond all the enjoyments of sense. Men accustomed to such researches sacrifice to them, not common enjoyments only, but riches, pomp, and power; because their satisfaction, in the former, far surpasseth all they feel from the latter. But what are the pleasures of speculation, compared with

with those of moral and divine truth! How far must the joy of mathematicians, statesmen, natural philosophers, in their highest elevations, fall short of the joy of a saint, whose soul, and all it's powers, are replenished to the full, with the most clear, sublime, and transporting views of divine and practical truth?

But what are all the glimpses and broken views, which the most advanced saint can have of God and divine things, through this dark medium, through the crannies and chinks of this crazy body, in comparison of what he shall enjoy, the moment he makes his escape out of mortality! If, as David says, "A day

" in

“ in God’s courts is better than a “ thousand;” a day in heaven, must be better than all the days of David’s life, than all the transports of joy, experienced by David, by Abraham, by Moses himself on the mount with God; by all, in every age of the world, even in their most sublime extasies of devotion!

“ Blessed,” saith our Saviour, “ are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” In this mortal state, a foretaste of this blessedness is all that is vouchsafed the pure in heart; or, at certain seasons, they have such a prospect, as Moses had of Palestine, from the top of mount Pisgah.—But how inferior are these, to what is reserved for them in the heavens?

heavens? "We now know but
" in part, and see these objects
" but darkly, as through a
" glafs; our views are dim, par-
" tial, interrupted, and, in some
" degree, false; but then, all
" obstructions being removed,
" and every false medium dis-
" sipated, we shall clearly see,
" and face to face." Our ideas
shall be corrected, enlarged,
and perfected, and all our affo-
cates in happiness shall have
clear and true, sentiments of
things; for they shall converse,
and live, in the strictest intimacy
and friendship, with spirits made
perfect; that is, men cleared
of all mistakes, and purged of
all errors, and each discordant
thought, which might mar the
harmony of converse.

But we shall see God, and be like him. To see God, and be like him!—this overwhelms the mind, and silenceth language. It is a happiness we may look for, because it is promised; but of it we ought not to attempt a description, because it exceeds description, and surpasseth the utmost reach of human thought.

But this is the felicity and perfection to which all are invited to aspire, who have resigned themselves to the conduct of the Divine Spirit, whose blessed office it is, by various and successive gradations, to train them for glory. Having disposed them for receiving the truth, he, by the energy thereof operating in their hearts, discovers

discovers to them the disorders, degradation, and miseries of their state; and graciously supports them under the shock of that discovery: Continuing skilfully to address the most operative principles of action, he sweetly constrains them to apply with the utmost ardour to the purification of their hearts. In this work, they are invigorated, and carried forward, by that Grace, which is sufficient for them, till they attain the habits of holiness in heart and life; and till their will is resolved into the will of God. Thus are they gradually trained for that state of perfect felicity, which is prepared, and purchased for them, by the blood of Jesus Christ; and for which, they

they shall still be advancing in meekness, till the happy hour of their dissolution. “ The path of the just is as the dawning light; that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Betwixt the periods just mentioned, there is the same difference with respect to the degrees of light, comfort, and joy, as there is in the progress of light, from the early dawn, to the splendour of noon-day. There may be casual obstructions of the light, and we ought not to expect the splendour of noon-day in the morning. But our satisfactions will generally be proportioned to our improvements, and our joys will correspond to our character.

LETTER

MADAM,

LETTER XIV.

MADAM,

HAVING laid before
you a succinct account
of the beginning, pro-
gress, and completion of the
work of Grace in the heart of
the children of light, I proceed,
according to my original plan,
to obviate objections to all that
I have offered, and to point out
the coincidence of the account
I have given with the sentiments
of the human mind, and the
dictates of Divine Revelation.

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That

That Almighty God can instantly produce a total change in the human heart, by a miraculous effort of power, without the concurrence or co-operation of the convert, will not be questioned by any man of sound judgement. But the possibility of any thing doth not infer it's existence. God may convert a sinner as suddenly as our Saviour cured diseases. The few instances recorded in Scripture of persons converted by an instantaneous act of Sovereign Power, and Grace, demonstrate the possibility of this; but that God will generally do so, we have no reason, either from Scripture or experience, to believe. He who, from a few facts of this kind, would conclude that

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this

this is the established method of implanting gracious principles in the heart of man, acts as unreasonably as if he supposed that there is the same probability of his subsisting by manna from heaven, as by the natural productions of the earth. The peremptory commands delivered in Scripture to put off the old man, and put on the new man, to make to ourselves a new heart, to work out our own salvation, and, with the utmost diligence, and fervour of spirit, to apply ourselves to the various duties of religion and righteousness, evince the absolute necessity of our own co-operation, and the free consent of our will.

Injunctions so frequently repeated, and so earnestly enforced, will, with a man of judgement and candour, out-weigh all artificial reasonings to the contrary. Deeply impressed with the necessity of exerting all the powers of his mind in regulating his thoughts, affections, and actions, he will expect the agency of the Divine Spirit; not in *contradiction*, but in exact *conformity*, to the laws of his being.

To extol the power of the Supreme Governor by speaking reverently and honourably of that, and all the other perfections which constitute the divine character, can give no offence to the friends of piety and virtue.

virtue. But to imagine that what is merely possible, will actually be done, to the violation of an established plan, graciously and wisely calculated to accomplish all the valuable ends which can be expected to arise from that bare possibility, is to imagine and speak at random. God hath encouraged us to depend upon him for the communication of every blessing necessary to our perfection and happiness. He hath promised to bestow all those blessings, according to the tenour of a covenant of grace and love, ratified by the blood of his dear Son; but he hath no where told us that he will, in any instance, set aside that well-ordered covenant, merely to make an ex-

periment how far an occasional exertion of his omnipotent arm can extend to supersede the use of a well-framed constitution.

~~to shew also~~ Almighty Power can produce a plentiful crop from a barren soil, without the intervention of man's culture, and without the influences of the sun, and of the rains and dews of heaven; but if the husbandman should, in the expectation of such a supernatural production, neglect the labours necessary for his provision, he would justly incur the imputation both of sloth and presumption. Our depending on God, for the interposition of his Almighty Power, without the warrant of a special promise,

~~and~~

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and

and contrary to the known rules of his government; so far from evidencing the vigour of our faith, and the unreservedness of our trust in him, will prove that our notions of the divine character and administration, are fundamentally erroneous.

"The gracious Author of life
" feeds the fowls of the air,
" who neither sow, nor reap,
" nor gather into barns." He could with equal ease support the whole race of animals, without their care, or industry. Nay, he could, by an immediate exertion of his Omnipotence, communicate to the whole world of animals, rational and irrational, all that variety of pleasing sensations, they now derive from the enjoyment of the different ob-

K 4 jects,

jects, which are suitable to their several constitutions. Thus far, and much farther, doth the notion of possibilities extend. But what man, endued with an ordinary share of common sense, can expect that the Almighty Governor will subvert the grand and beautiful system he hath already established, and according to which he fulfills the purposes of his unsearchable wisdom? That he will, in the government of the natural world, violate his original appointment, is not presumed; and *to hope* that he will do so, in the moral world, must be unreasonable. The moral world is the grand and primary object of the Divine Administration; and must the laws of his mo-

ral government be accounted less sacred, and more liable to be superseded or reversed, than those by which he rules over the world of nature? No, certainly. *These* were framed in subserviency to *those*. Our Saviour assures us, that the frame of nature, and the laws imposed on it, may be altered, nay, shall be dissolved; but the laws by which the moral world is governed, admit of no variation. The truth is, to imagine that God will violate, in our favour, the plan of his administration, either in his kingdom of Providence or Grace, favours of a conscious pride, and persuasion of our own importance, extremely unbecoming in such unprofitable servants.

That

That miraculous efforts of Almighty Power, exerted in an instant, and productive of effects so perfect in their kind, as to admit of no farther improvement, conduce most to the Divine glory, is the sentiment but of a vulgar mind. What is grand and astonishing, strikes the senses, and excites the passions of superficial observers, in a more affecting and lively manner than effects produced by the slow and progressive operations of secondary causes. But, in the government of his own world, God intended to display the continued exercise of his *wisdom*, and to reserve marvellous interpositions of his *immediate power*, for singular occasions.

Signs

Signs and prodigies are never exhibited, but to alarm and rouse an unthinking and incredulous world, and to execute the stupendous designs of mercy, or of judgement; nor would signs and prodigies, though repeated every day, keep at an equal pitch the astonishment of men. The passion of surprise is, of necessity, as momentary as the causes of it are uncommon. When these disappear, or become familiar, the surprise is gone. Comets blazing every night in the heavens, would, in process of time, be surveyed with as little transport as the rising and setting sun. With a kind of superstitious emotion, the peasant gazes at an eclipse; but the sun and moon, walking

ing in their brightness, he beholds without amazement. Besides, God hath framed the general plan of his administration, not so much to engage our astonishment, as to prompt us to the best use of our reason, of our ingenuity, of our industry; and to provide the most worthy entertainment for our best affections. A man of sound judgement who, for these truly improving purposes, studies the works of nature, and the events of providence, sees the Divine Glory more conspicuously displayed in executing his grand purposes, by the intervention of subordinate powers, operating uniformly according to the fixed laws of a wisely-adjusted

adjusted system. Is not the harmonious revolution of the heavenly lights, in their various orbits, more fruitful of sublime instruction, in the perfections and providence of God, than the going back of the sun on the dial of Ahaz? The Divine Glory shines far more illustriously upon the mind that traces the various laws and combinations of powers, by which the earth produceth her fruits, animals subsist, and men arrive at maturity; than if all these effects should immediately exist by the *fiat* of Almighty Power.

To the mind of a philosopher the discoveries in natural history afford truly grand ideas

ideas of the Divine nature; and he who knows, and is not improved by them, is insensible to whatever ought to exalt and perfect human nature. But it is from the operations of God in the moral world, we derive the truest and most affecting sentiments of the Divine Majesty and Glory. This is the most curious and interesting object of the human mind,—the noblest scene that can be laid open to the intellectual powers. But how little do we know, how much less can we comprehend, of what the Great God has done, is at present doing, and will hereafter do, to conduct all his children to perfection! The period fast approacheth,—the happy period, when

when the whole shall be laid open for the entertainment and improvement of every Intelligence. Then shall his government be fully vindicated,—his goodness towards all,—his forbearance towards the wicked,—his peculiar,—and distinguishing favour towards the just;—all shall be displayed to the triumph and exultation of his faithful servants. Amen; and to his name be praise.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

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I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

Blest be His glory, etc.

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LETTER XV.

MADAM,

THE saints above sing
THE song of Moses and
the Lamb. In celestial
harmony, they celebrate the dis-
pensations of Providence and
Grace, under the Old and New
Testament. In melodious strains,
they commemorate acts of con-
summate wisdom, and of exuber-
rant goodness, to the world in
general, and each to himself in
particular. All will exert their
noblest powers, and tune their
voices,

voices, to the praise of God and
the Lamb.

Nor does even Christian humility forbid us to believe, what we are authorised by the Divine Spirit to affirm, that the Lord, our Redeemer, will reckon up all the good actions of his followers, the most trivial, as well as the more important. Before angels and saints, he will confess their names, and enumerate the pious and benevolent offices of those, who have been animated by a pure intention, to promote the interests of his poor friends, the comfort of his creatures, or the honour of his name upon the earth. All that they have done from a sense of duty, and of free choice;—especially

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their self-renunciation;—their preference of the will of God to their own inclinations;—their conflicts, struggles, and efforts, in obedience to conscience;—their sincere endeavours, in submission to the suggestions of the Spirit of Grace, are faithfully recorded, and shall be graciously remembered. Their tears he hath put in his bottle. Their holy fortitude,—patient resignation,—meekness and simplicity,—those acts of justice and charity, which have been calumniated by the world, overlooked among men, and perhaps forgotten by themselves, will appear upon the records of Heaven, and be published in the ears of all in Heaven and on Earth.

The

The firm belief, and earnest expectation of this solemnity, so awful in itself, yet so solacing to an upright heart, hath, to thousands of suffering saints, been a source of sweet and seasonable consolations. That the prospect should not prompt all who are called to the hope of that high honour, to become more rich towards God, in the fruits of compassion and mercy, and to aspire after sublimer improvements in patience, in fortitude, in purity, in faithfulness, is astonishing! Ambition is a powerful principle in the human breast. Many who see nothing but degrading meanness, in the gross pleasures of sensuality, and have fortitude to resist the charms of gold, feel themselves impelled, by an insatiable thirst after fame,

to enterprises much less practicable than the ordinary duties of the Christian calling. I need not speak of the vast numbers of candidates for this kind of glory, who have been unsuccessful in the pursuit. Those whose sanguine hopes were not frustrated, what did even they obtain? A puff of perishing applause, from a few incompetent judges; a respectable name for a few years, and over a narrow extent of country; a name, which, a few ages, at most, buried in forgetfulness, or which, to the end of time, may be consigned to deserved infamy. But all who, by a patient continuance in doing well, seek after glory, honour, and immortality, shall haye their labour of love,

love, and works of holiness, proclaimed by Him, who alone discerns the full value of genuine worth, the bountiful Rewarder of the faithful, and the Sovereign Judge of the whole rational world. That his approbation may be the more universally promulgated, all the bright orders of Angels, and all the individuals of the human kind, shall be the eye and ear witnesses of the honours to be conferred on the just. Not in an obscure corner shall their faithful and zealous services be recounted. Heaven is to be the theatre, where they shall be honourably distinguished. Nor shall their fame be mortal. It is to be a bright gem in that crown of righteousness, which

L 3 shall

shall shine with increasing lustre during a wide and boundless eternity. How should these transporting considerations rouse every power of activity, and fire every heart, to excel in every thing good and praiseworthy? Were this glorious prospect frequently realised to the mind, the Christian, whose conversation is in Heaven, would become more indifferent every day, to the judgement of men, and more ambitious of those immortal honours, which God hath reserved for the faithful. This blessed principle operating uniformly and vigorously in all hearts, and producing it's proper effects, would make this earth the delightful abode of righteousness, peace, and truth.

This

This publick approbation which now might endanger our virtue, will then have no other influence, than to produce the exertion of the whole force of the soul, in new strains of gratitude, to him, to whom the praise of all is due; to him, who afforded the occasions,—furnished the means,—bestowed the aids,—and ministered the supports, they will pour forth their souls in thanksgiving and praise. To him, who, passing over your failures, imparted the beginning, the progress, and the perfection of that virtue, which, to you, will be an ever-flowing fountain of felicity and joy. You will for ever sing glory, and honour, and praise.

L 4

But

But we think and speak as children do, of the actions and enjoyments of wise men, when we attempt an account of the honours and joys of glorified spirits: But from the revelation of God, and from all our ideas of virtue, friendship, and blessedness, we must conclude, that such is the felicity of the saints in Heaven. Reciprocal returns of praise, for what God hath done for them, and gratulation for their compliance with him, are the chief ingredients of that glory, to which we are called.

But if the virtuous character were formed in us otherwise, than by the exertion of our own will, in subordination to, and compliance with, the agency of

God; there could be no place for praise and gratulation. Less glory would redound to God, and less honour to his saints, if fewer acts of grace on his part, and fewer acts of obedience on theirs, were sufficient to form the virtuous character. Happy were it, if men would cease to amuse themselves with expectations, which seem adverse to the plan of Divine government, and the end of our being.

We naturally wish to avoid pain, and an active exertion of our powers, in contradiction to the bias of our will. Therefore, we wish to have a change produced in us, with little trouble to ourselves. If wrong habits,
and

and corrupt affections, were destroyed, and the contrary implanted in us at once by Almighty Power, it would be far more consonant to our sluggish wishes, than the tedious, painful, and laborious course of self-denial, and activity, required in subduing corrupt, and acquiring virtuous habits. But tho' the former may be more agreeable to man, the latter is most acceptable to God. This, in the end, will redound to our own felicity, and to the praise of the glory of that Grace, wherein we are accepted in the Beloved.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XVI.

MADAM,

O a sober and candid judgement it must appear evident, that we have a painful and laborious work assigned us by our Sovereign, and Judge. But in this we are not left to act by ourselves. In its beginning, progress, and conclusion, at all times, and in all places; we are assured of a Divine influence and direction. It is indeed our honour, and happiness, to be workers together with God. But

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the work is not ours; it is God's. "We are God's husbandry, we are God's building." If we are commanded to draw near to Him, we are also assured of an inward drawing, and teaching, which doth not leave our compliance altogether to our own choice.

In baptism, we vow an exact conformity to the Lord Jesus. But in this ordinance we express our dependance, not on the efforts and energy of our will; but on the aids and influences of that Spirit, which is communicated in this institution. We are saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. The apostles consider the residence

dence of the Holy Ghost in us, not as a matter of doubt, but as a truth familiar to the mind of every Christian. That He dwells in us as his temple, superintending our thoughts, regulating the movements of our minds, and, watchfully and skilfully, directing our lives; a guide, ever present to aid and comfort us, they consider as an indisputed truth, and as the undoubted privilege of every good person. For the continuance of a gift of such consequence, we must indeed apply to God; but in this we are not left to our own direction; for the Spirit helps our infirmities, and makes intercession, or enables us to intercede for ourselves, with an acceptable

acceptable and successful fer-
vency.

To watch, and to walk cir-
cumspectly, is our duty; but to
our own vigilance and circum-
spection we are not intrusted,
but to him who is the Bishop
and Shepherd of souls. To
him all power in heaven and
earth is given, in reward of
his obedience and sufferings.
He, for the benefit of his church,
is the head over all things;
therefore, conducted by his
Spirit within, and protected by
his Providence without, we are
secured against all trials, and
events;—against being tempted
above what we are able to
bear;—against being separated
from the love of God;—against
suffering

suffering irreparably from the most insidious and powerful combinations of visible or invisible adversaries. Surrounded as we are with temptations;—threatened by the power and policy of our passions;—endangered by the treachery of our own hearts;—“we must work “out our salvation with fear and “trembling:” But we are encouraged by the assurance given us, that God worketh in us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.

The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and the law, in our members, warreth against the law of our minds. In this warfare, the struggle is justly compared to the most painful sufferings
and

and laborious exercises. But we are assured that “the law of “the Spirit of life in Christ “Jesus, will make us free from “the law of sin, and of death, “Greater is he that is in us, than “he that is in the world; and “through him we shall be more “than conquerors.”

If we keep to the better direction, we shall not fall under the influence of any base passion; at least, no iniquity shall obtain dominion over us.

The aids graciously provided as remedies for our ignorance and weakness, though rejected by some who boast of deep researches into the philosophy of our constitution, are, in every view,

view, adapted to the present state, and feelings of human nature. The Author of our being hath implanted in our breasts, a variety of powers, which require the intervention of foreign culture, before they can be applied to any valuable purpose. Without instruction from others, we could not exercise aright our limbs, our organs of speech, nor the faculty of reason. There is, in young minds, a principle of docility, of imitation, and an inquisitive spirit, which correspond to their untutored state. Even the exertion of bodily strength depends not so much on inherent power, as on the influence of discipline and habit. Nor is the case otherwise

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in works of ingenuity. One endued with a more than ordinary measure of natural acuteness, and extent of mental qualities, will not, after repeated experiments, and a long continued application, acquire that exactness, masterly skill, and methodical dexterity of operation, which another of inferior capacity, assisted by proper instructors, may, in a very short time, attain. The enlarged improvements of the most consummate philosophers, are derived from principles instilled into their minds by education. Without a preparatory course of instruction, even a Sir Isaac Newton would never have been accounted the chief of philosophers.

Amidst

Amidst those scenes of suffering, which try human fortitude to the utmost, the mind, by a kind of constitutional impulse, seeks from others that relief which inherent powers cannot afford. Under the agonies of bodily pain, under the scourge of unmerited violence, under the calamities of penury, the sufferer has recourse, with importunity, to those whose skill, humanity, or power, are presumed sufficient for alleviating, or removing, his pains and sorrows.

A heart warmed with piety and Divine love, will, in every enterprise, and under every trial, implore God's gracious countenance and support. Nay,

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event those who, in their prosperous days, treat the doctrine of Divine aids and influences, with a profusion of ridicule, will, in cases of unsupportable pain, and of alarming danger, flee for succour to that God, whom, till then, they neglected and despised. The use of supernatural aids in Religion cannot, therefore, be denied, without contradicting facts, which have their foundation in the internal frame of human nature.

Those judicious teachers of the heathen world, who understood human nature as well as some modern dictators in literature, give it as their opinion, "That no man, at any time, became eminently great,

" or good, without, a divine impulse." Instances are recorded of armies performing wonders of Heroism in battle, from the persuasion that the invisible powers of heaven were their witnesses, and guardians, in the combat, and ready to second every effort for victory. Upon the principles of Christianity, what scope is afforded for acquitting ourselves with a Divine ardour in the labours of our high and holy calling? But I reserve the consideration of the comfort arising from the assurance of Divine assistances, as the subject of a future letter.

I am, &c.

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LETTER XVII.

M A D A M,

W HEN we attentively survey the dispensation of grace through Christ Jesus, it must move our regrete and astonishment to consider the reception given to it by mankind. To observe it made the subject of idle disputes,—disbelived by some,—doubted by others,—mistaken by many;—thought so plain and obvious by multitudes, as to supersede the necessity of a revelation,—and treated with absolute

solute neglect, by such as profess to believe it, must affect the susceptible heart with the deepest concern. Here is a striking proof of the unreasonableness, unworthiness, and insensibility, of degenerate men. But to you it will be agreeable to observe, That the discovery given of the grace of God in the Gospel, imparts to the human mind the most ample satisfaction, in reference to our most important concerns;—a satisfaction no where else to be found.

So consonant to our ideas of goodness, and so agreeable to our hopes from the Divine Being is the discovery, that it hath been mistaken for a branch of natural religion. But when it is observed, that

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the ancient philosophers, who were both more capable, and better disposed to inquire, than those in modern times, fell short of the meanest Christian in their ideas of Divine grace, the necessity of Divine revelation cannot be doubted. The ancients taught, That God would befriend the just, in proportion to their good-behaviour, But that He would shew favour to bad men,—solicit their return,—interpose for their recovery,—receive them on their repentance;—of all this; of all the benefits of his Son's mediation, they knew nothing with certainty: And if our modern sceptics know more than the ancient philosophers, they owe

it to that revelation they seem
to despise.

Great and happy is that change, which the interposition of God, through Christ Jesus, hath effected upon the moral government,—the spiritual interests, — the sacred privileges and civil claims — of mankind. Without this we might have wished,—hoped,—expected,—and, with the thinking part of the ancients, had recourse to tradition, for what we ignorantly call the religion of nature. But to a mind conscious of guilt,—persuaded of the rectitude of the Divine government,—impressed with the purity and justice of the Divine nature,—and replete with boundless fears,—
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the methods of grace alone can give relief. In rejecting it, is there not a folly, and insensibility, peculiar to those “ who have “ eyes and see not; and ears, but “ hear not ? ”

Few errors adopted by this frivolous age, are of more pernicious tendency, than the belief that the offers made us in the gospel, are such as might reasonably be expected, under any mild and equitable administration of government. Scarcely can any thing be more obvious than that the former is perfectly adapted to the state of human nature, and may be depended upon with absolute security ; whereas the terms of the latter never will be fulfilled ; and, if relied on, *must*

must give a dreadful disappointment. That we will do what may be reasonably expected, is a chimerical supposition.

Who applies for the grace of God with the fervour suited to his state? Hath the sincerest penitent that sorrow, that vigilance, those earnest endeavours, which his condition requires? Who combats his passions with that fortitude and perseverance, which might be expected? Have we not perpetually need of pardon and renewed acts of grace? Could we claim these upon any plan of mild administration? But of all these, we are assured, by the Grace of the Gospel: Here all our desires and expectations are fully satisfied. Here is

is a plan of government exactly adapted to the condition of sinful creatures. The gospel contains an hypothesis, more truly philosophical than has ever been conceived by philosophers, ancient or modern.

It merits particular attention, that under the mildest governments, the subject may incur a forfeiture of all his privileges, by bad behaviour. But it is by final and inflexible obstinacy, alone, we forfeit the Grace of the gospel. Our privileges do not arise from any claim or right, but from the grace of God, and the merits of his Son; therefore, can be recovered by a new application to the same source from whence they were derived.

derived. If a sinner applies, he shall obtain grace. Tho' he is conscious that he hath not improved, as he might and ought to have done, the aid already vouchsafed to him; yet he hath not incurred a forfeiture, but may renew his addresses; and will, upon his doing so with suitable humility and earnestness, obtain renewed aids to recover himself to repentance: — and, notwithstanding new failures, he has access to the exhaustless Source of grace, and forgiveness; whence he may, by renewed applications and endeavours, derive grace, till the desired change is accomplished. How superior then is the Grace of God, to the mildest governments among men? How essentially different,

from

174 *Exertion of the Will, &c.* Let. 17.

from the terms on which most men would rest their hopes!

I am unwilling to insult the understanding of any person, by supposing that a man should encourage himself in wickedness from the grace of God, and apply for it, without any honest design or endeavour to reform. For inflexible obstinacy disqualifies for grace. In the case supposed, obstinacy is heightened by the most audacious disingenuity: And he who hopes for favour, whilst he persists in sin, is willingly deceived, and there is no remedy. But to offer cautions on so plain a subject, is superfluous. Your patience, for the present, shall have no further trial, from,

Your, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

M A D A M,

REAT liberties are commonly taken with the posterity of Abraham, whom the Lord brought out of Egypt, and whose perverseness we, upon good grounds, censure with great severity. But we forget, that in condemning them, we pass sentence against ourselves. Like them, we hope to get to heaven with little trouble, we murmur at the hardships of the journey, begrudge

begrudge our toils and labours; and, like them, refuse to combat our passions; and therefore, "fall after the same example of unbelief." Our Saviour hath given us a far more explicit account, than Moses gave the Israelites, of the difficulties, toils, and dangers, of our journey; but we delude ourselves, with hopes of easily arriving at the promised rest, by an effort of Almighty Power. However the experience of every good person coincides with the declaration of the Lord Jesus, that it is through much tribulation, through pain, and suffering, we can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If we are subjected to the same labours and hardships, in the practice

practice of moral virtue with other men, what benefit have we by the dispensation of Grace? "Much, every way." A young Disciple, aided by an accomplished Tutor, will make proficiency in learning, far beyond what he could attain by the help of books only, and the other implements of study. He himself must indeed apply, but his Tutor will give him the necessary helps, convey to his mind instruction, quicken his diligence, and engage him to exert himself with vigour. Under an able and experienced general, a young gentleman learns the art of war. His instructions, directions, example; his look, his voice, will animate the pupil in that service. He will expose the

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young warrior to toils and dangers, hazards, and hardships; such as he is able to bear; and, by these methods, will form him for the military life. Of what advantage was it to the Israelites, to have the Lord of Hosts for their Leader and their King? But of all these, and many more advantages far surpassing these, ~~he~~ is possessed, who resigns himself to the conduct of the Divine Spirit, and accepts the mediation of the Son of God.

Till men limit their imaginations, and dismiss arbitrary suppositions; till they found their judgements on the word of God, and well-known facts; we shall continue to be infested with the dreams of fanatics, and the cavils of

of infidels. But the slightest attention to what is extremely obvious, the distinction between what men *will* do of themselves, and what they *may* be brought to do with the aid of others, would have prevented that whole controversy, about the powers of man to practise religion. How many do you know, who, by proper culture, might have been useful and ornamental to society; but left, as they are, to their own direction, are good for nothing? Men of rank and birth, are too often of no other utility, than to add to the publick consumpt. Possessed as they are of good natural parts, and of means and motives to improvement, they might have done honour

to their families, and service to their country, had they fallen into good hands. In provinces remote from the seat of government, we just now observe, with deep regret, multitudes abandoning their native country; who, patronized by men of skill, benevolence, and patience, might have contributed to the defence, and opulence, of the commonwealth. To mention the improvements of youth by education is superfluous; happy were it, if half the trouble were employed in forming the minds, that some of the most worthless take to distort the bodies, of the rising generation.—But enough of those who reject the gospel, and have recourse to the terms of

of a mild and equitable administration.

Truely deplorable would be the state of mankind, if our hopes were founded on our own efforts. If the hopes of the impenitent were founded on the reformation, they themselves would accomplish;—if the hopes of the penitent did depend on the improvements, they themselves would make upon their own character;—if the expectations of the best men, were founded on the proportion between their privileges and advancements in religion. All men, without exception, have need of provision for cancelling their guilt, for supplying their indi-

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gence, and helping their daily infirmities.

Happy! happy are those only, who have resigned themselves to the Grace of God in Christ Jesus!—For though we daily incur a forfeiture, we may, through Faith, and a patient continuance in well-doing, inherit the promises. May ours be the blessedness of being under the government of Him who knows all the avenues to our souls, and is ever present with us, to moderate our desires, quicken our endeavours, strengthen our weakness, and support us amidst those dangers to which we are continually exposed. I am

Your, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R X I X,

M A D A M,

F all the discoveries
 O made by the Son of
 God, there is none that
 we receive with warmer grati-
 tude, than the prospect he hath
 opened to us of immortal life.
 It is the distinguishing excellence
 of the Christian dispensation, to
 bring life and immortality to
 light. But the chief preju-
 dice in the minds of libertines
 against the Gospel, is the clear
 account it contains of the joys
 and terrors of a future state.

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A noble Lord wrote five volumes, to weaken the belief of it; and another of the same rank acknowledges, That his aversion from the Gospel is founded in the discovery it hath made of a state of retribution. If we trace to it's source the high admiration in which many affect to hold the philosophy of the ancients, it will be found to originate in it's silence concerning the same doctrine. Hence also, the zeal of philosophers, for the innate beauty of virtue. A bad man is hurt by the idea of retribution. It is disrelished by a man of doubtful character. A profligate recollects it with horrour: but a man of true spirit, will rejoice to know the final result of things. He commiserates

miserates the weakness of those who would hold another life, as an uncertainty, just as we do the timidity of dying men, who insist with their friends upon being flattered with the hopes of a recovery.

If we had no ground of hope, but the use we may make of our own powers; the ridicule with which a philosophical Peer treats the ambition of mankind, in aspiring to immortality, at the hazard of eternal damnation, might be well founded. But if his Lordship had given any degree of that attention to the Gospel of Peace, which he gave to the Peace of Utrecht, he must have seen how improperly his ridicule was applied. He would have

have discovered, that we launch into eternity, upon the invitation, and under the protection, of the Son of God.—Of him who, by his Miracles, demonstrated his Ability; and, by his Death, his Willingness, to secure our happiness.—Of him, who is exalted to the right hand of God, and possessed of sovereign Dominion over all. Safe under his almighty protection,—sheltered by the merit of his obedience and sufferings,—secure in the fidelity of his safe conduct; the soul, that adheres to him, proceeds through life with courage and confidence, encounters death without terror, and stands before the tribunal of God, humbly depending upon his relation to his Saviour, and his Judge.

Conscious

Conscious of a patient continuance in well-doing, though conscious also of numberless failures and defects, the Christian, from his union with Christ, derives a settled tranquillity of mind, with an immunity from the terrors of death. He, who hath been taught of God to die to sin, and to be crucified to the world, will welcome his change; and, at death, lift up his head with joy, “knowing that ‘his redemption draweth nigh.’”

Among the ancients, wise men, unenlightened by the Gospel, have triumphed in the prospect of that blessed day; when, dismissed from the body, and escaping from the bustle, and the croud below, they should

should mingle with heroes and demigods, explore the arcana of nature, and see, at once, all the beauties of the universe, with rapture and delightful astonishment! If they, whose ardent wishes of immortality were their strongest arguments for it, could quit this world with transport and exultation; shall not the clearest discoveries, supported by the most undoubted authority, inspire the Christian with joys more sincere, in proportion as they are better founded?

To behold the triumphs of religion, and the final period of vice:—An end of all the disorders and miseries produced by the latter, and the glory and perfection

perfection of the former:—
To be brought unto Mount Zion, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, to Jesus the Mediator of the covenant, and to God the Judge of all.—To feel ourselves qualified for, and admitted into, such a company, must, to the soul formed for society, and for friendship, impart joys transcending conception. That virtue should attain this high degree of perfection, under the government of a Being absolutely perfect, is a natural sentiment. It occurred to the ancient sages. Bold, concerning it were their conjectures: The prospect roused their curiosity, fired their ambition, and afforded them

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them supreme delight. But it's reality could be ascertained only by revelation.

Upon what other foundation can the absolute certainty of an event, so far transcending our most elevated conceptions, be established? We wish for a happiness more perfect, and more durable, than is to be expected on earth. But we have not seen God, at any time; and have no idea of happiness, in a state better suited to our nature, than this sublunary system. We know that flesh and blood, as they now are, cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, neither any original sentiment in our nature, nor any reason from probability or experience, could suggest

suggest, that we shall, one day, be made completely happy in a state unknown,—in the immediate presence, likeness, and friendship of the Great God, whom no flesh can see and live. Before our most soaring thoughts, and sanguine desires, could rise so high, we must have had full assurance, that, after a dissolution, the body shall be restored to life;—that the soul is to survive that dissolution;—that a reunion is to ensue,—and that, after such reunion, the whole man shall be capable of a state of growing perfection and bliss, during eternity. To demonstrate these points, were a problem too hard for our unaided reason, with all the presumptions arising from

from the present scene of things,
in favour of the discovery.

But it is alleged, “ That the
“ future existence of human
“ souls was believed, upon phi-
“ losophical principles, before
“ the promulgation of the Gof-
“ pel.” The Gospel was, in
part, promulgated immediately
after the apostacy of man.
From this source, the belief of
heroes going to the gods, af-
ter death, was propagated long
before the names PHILOSOPHY
and PHILOSOPERS were known
in ancient Greece and Rome. In
this persuasion, altars were e-
rected, sacrifices and interces-
fions were offered up, and
various other modes of homage
performed, for procuring the
removal

removal of public and private calamities.

This belief did not derive its origin from philosophy: For, by many, the existence of incorporeal substance was denied, and the dissolution of the soul with the body affirmed by many more. The gods, with whom departed souls were said to consort, were gods, whose fathers and mothers are recorded, by name, in their systems of Mythology; who had lived and died, and were *afterwards* enrolled in the list of new deities. Departed spirits were said to be actuated by the same passions; employed in the same exercises, and regaled with the same gross sensual enjoyments, as when they were in the body.

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That

That most virtuous, and most illuminated sect of ancient times, the Stoicks, refined a little upon this idea of a future state. But what was the opinion which they adopted? What did they substitute? They maintained, that all particular souls were, after death, to be absorbed into, or incorporated with, the general soul of the universe; a tenet which infers the loss of a distinct personal existence, and approaches near to either nonsense or atheism.

The Christian Heaven, as revealed in the Gospel, lays open the prospect of better Company; and of honours, services, and joys, beyond the comprehension of the most penetrating philosophers. The belief of that

that glorious event, is not founded upon the sense of ambiguous phrases, easily capable of another meaning, by the refinements of a plausible criticism. It is founded upon incontestible facts: upon the Resurrection, Ascension, and Exaltation of Jesus, our Mediator, and Forerunner, "who shall, in due time, return to receive us to himself, that we may forever be where he now is."

May we always cherish those seeds of piety and virtue, which then will attain maturity and perfection.

I am,
Your, &c.

O 2 LET-

LETTER XX.

M A D A M,

WERE we caught up
W into the third heavens,
to see what passes
there, we should want language
to communicate our thoughts;
for they are things unutterable.
Our judgement of things is so
much under the influence of
sensible objects; and the im-
pressions made upon us by our
bodily organs are so habitual
to us, that, in condescension
to our weakness, Revelation
conveys to our minds ideas of
celestial bliss, by means of ima-
ges

ges borrowed from the noblest external objects, but distinguished by the most excellent properties. Rivers of pleasure that flow for ever,—riches that are durable, where moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through, and steal;—free from internal decay, and safe from outward violence, an inheritance everlasting, a city that hath foundations, a kingdom that cannot be moved;—crowns of righteousness, and glory, that fade not away.—These are grand emblems of the felicity of Heaven, and convey to us sentiments, though inadequate to the object, yet expressive of the compleat happiness of the blessed, and intimate that all our powers of perception will be satisfied to the utmost.

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But such as have formed, by observation and experience, a just estimate of things, must be sensible that the happiness of heaven cannot consist merely in the pleasures of sense and imagination. Even here below we feel these cannot make us happy. Of this, all who are furnished with the means, and daily make the experiment, are intimately sensible. A conscious integrity, the esteem of the wise and the good, the favour of God,—these are essential, internal, unalienable goods, which may be heightened by adventitious circumstances, but are independant of them. In them the bliss and glory of mankind really consist, and they are, in the good man,

“ a well

“ a well of living water, springing up unto eternal life.”

At that blessed period, the weak, doubting, but well-intentioned christian, will have his title to favour fully recognised.—The righteous, persecuted by calumny and envy, shall shine forth as the sun.—Martyrs will receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of the Righteous Judge:—Those that once groaned under the weight of spiritual domination, and had been cast out by bigotry and superstition, shall be cloathed in white garments. Joy, surpassing comprehension, shall diffuse itself through all the subjects of the kingdom of God; “ joys which eye hath not seen, nor ear

O 4 “ heard,

“ heard, nor hath it entered into
“ the heart of man to conceive.”

If the doctrine of the resurrection of the body had been discovered by some venerable sage, or had the curious antiquary brought it to light, from some fragment of remote antiquity; men of taste would have received it with the highest encomiums. But, being exposed to the view of the vulgar, in a book to which all have equal access, it is regarded only by the wise. Had our philosophers the curiosity to which they pretend, they would have investigated, from the customs of remote ages, the bias that is in human nature, to the doctrine of the Resurrection. The ancient nations regarded a de-

cent funeral, as a matter of high importance, and the want of it as a real injury to the spirit of the deceased. To disturb the ashes, or violate the sepulchres of the dead, they believed to be a most injurious impiety. They apprehended that the relation between the Soul and the Body, subsists after death. Did they think that there was no happiness, unless both the constituent parts of man be treated with propriety and respect! Or was the reverence, care, and tenderness, shown the body, founded in an original revelation of the doctrine of the Resurrection? And, was the tradition forgotten, whilst the rites respecting it were observed?

In

In the fullest and most explicit manner, hath the Lord Jesuſ instructed us in this doctrine; and ſo connected it with the truth of his own Resurrection, that they muſt ſtand or fall together. His Apostle hath alſo auſſured us, that our bodies being liberateſ from the laws of groſſ matter, we ſhall enjoy the activity of ſpiritual natures. Men of taste, who investigate the history of nature, would have employed their reſearches with advantage to themſelves, and to mankind, if they had puſhed their inquiries farther into the ſublimation of matter, and into thoſe laws, whereby ſublimateſ bodies move ſo diſferent from thoſe to which our corporeal frame is ſubjeсted.

subjected. Had they elucidated the doctrine of the resurrection, by a more full and plain account of those systems, the existence of which they have demonstrated, they would have performed a substantial service to the world. Cloathed with a vehicle of this nature, our souls shall no longer be retarded, but assisted in performing the will of God, as the angels do in heaven. Delivered from all the effects of that universal corruption, with which human nature is now so deeply defiled, the saint shall shine forth in all the majesty of his divine original, and, in every movement and lineament, express his inherent excellency. Jarring elements shall enter no more into the composition of his

his body; the seeds of diseases, and death, shall be wholly eradicated; and he shall live, and reign for ever, in Glory ineffable!

The Christian now bowed down with infirmities, with diseases, and old age, revives, and is consoled with this joyful prospect of relief. But most of all do we rejoice in the hope of being delivered from those disorders of mind, wherewith all struggle, and which but few overcome; because their strength is laid in our present constitution. O the happy period, when sense, imagination, and all the powers now combined against the interests of virtue, shall unite together in it's fair four.

vous.—Knowledge shall be improved into certainty;—faith into vision; — hope into fruition;—our bodies shall be fashioned like unto Christ's Glorious Body, whose face shone brighter than the sun, and whose raiment was whiter than the light! How can your heart contain that joy and triumph, which now expand your breast upon the prospect of that glorious day, in which the Lord Jesus will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that love him?

I am,
Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXI.

MADAM,

FROM the prospect of the
 F celestial Glory, laid
 open to the view of
 mankind in Holy Scripture,
 it must appear an object highly
 worthy the pursuit of every
 rational and considerate creature.
 Can our men of ambition think
 of any thing so well calculated
 to gratify, in the highest degree,
 their ruling passion? They
 are not men of taste, who do
 not here discern beauty and ex-
 cellence of the highest refine-
 ment. Let our men of honour
 recognise the dignity and glo-

sy

ry to which the saints shall be advanced at the period under consideration, as the supreme object of a mind generous and truely elevated. The wife, and such as carefully consult their own interest, will find it most effectually secured, by employing all their cares, toils, and industry, in the attainment of a happiness infinitely surpassing all their desires.

To your good sense, Madam, let me appeal; whether you can conceive it possible that the invention of men could have devised the representation of the celestial Glory contained in the Revelation of God? But admitting that the report in the Gospel is uncertain; a man of judgement

judgement will consider it as more worthy all his desires and endeavours, than any other object that can be proposed to his hopes. If in this there were an equal degree of uncertainty with our other pursuits, a man of sense would give this the preference. — Magnificence and grandeur, fame and renown, power and dominion, sceptres and crowns, are sought at every hazard. Uncertainty is the inseparable concomitant of all earthly pursuits; and, though the same uncertainty attended our aspiring to the heavenly bliss, can the one bear any comparison with the other? To be ranked among the friends of the Lord Jesus,—to see him as he is,—to be like him;—what on

on earth can be compared to this!

In what light can we behold libertines, and licentious talkers! What will men of spirit think of those who employ all their powers to discredit this doctrine? Will men of judgement bestow upon them their attention? Can they escape the displeasure and contempt of the friends of society? Men of liberal sentiments will, and must, look upon them as the avowed enemies of their country.

Such as are not willing to think deeply, upon religious subjects, consider the happiness of the righteous, as the natural progress of virtue, under the

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government of absolute goodness. Nor would most men except to the account of future retribution given in the gospel, were there not also, in the same gospel, a representation of the punishment of the wicked. This is terrible. It is shocking. But this is no argument against the certainty of the event. If a distinction between the just and unjust must finally take place, and if the felicity of the former is such as Scripture describes, such also must be the misery of the latter. Without the Gospel, we could not have pursued our inquiries, conformably, in any degree, to the nature of things; but the representation it contains cannot, now, be questioned. All that

infidels have offered, in proof of the contrary, amounts to—nothing at all. The boldest, and perhaps the ablest writer among them, allows that, “After all, ‘things may come to this pass.’” He, indeed, lays hold of Mr. Locke’s opinion of matter, and from our ignorance of the whole of the divine œconomy, insinuates that, “Possibly, it may be ‘otherwise.’” But will any man, of a common discretion, rest in such a conclusion?

A very late ingenious free-thinker urges the Divine goodness against our Saviour’s account of future punishments. But may not the justice of his ideas of the Divine goodness be questioned? Divines of the last age

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are thought to have given harsh representations of the divine attributes. To take off these impressions, this, and former writers have exalted, and extended, the attribute of goodness; and to it alone, they would engage the attention of the human mind. But they have run into one error, by labouring to correct another. It is not by considering things in the abstract, that we always most successfully investigate the truth. Ought not our philosophers to have paid some attention to the other attributes of God? Regard is also due to his present visible administration, where indeed is goodness, exuberant goodness! but a due mixture of severity, is no less conspicuous. One
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transgression of the divine law involves men in irretrievable misery through life. Infamy, and absolute ruin, are the consequences of single deviations from the rules of truth and justice. The least attention to the history of mankind; to the misfortunes and calamities of those within the circle of our own acquaintance, prove the severity exercised towards offenders, here, in this state of discipline,—where the interests of the good and bad are blended: What then may be expected, in a state of retribution, where they shall be for ever separated?

The speculations of dogmatical reasoners, against the duration of the punishment of sinners,

ners, are idle and impertinent. Who hath faculties to carry him into the depths of eternity? What aid or encouragement have we from revelation, to pursue such inquiries? Clear and determinate are the ideas conveyed to the mind, in popular language, by our Saviour: But they by no means justify the bold deductions of abstract reasoners,—they are plainly intended for the right conduct of life.

The retribution is evidently final, and the last scene of the present drama. Who will interpose for the miserable, when the Son hath delivered up the Kingdom to the Father? They

must

must suffer, till they have paid the uttermost farthing.

They are no philosophers, who have objected with so much acrimony to the unquenchable fire threatened by our Saviour. For it is easy to conceive a penetrating flame, adapted to a subtil system of matter, of the duration or extinction of which, like that of the sun, we can form no idea.

To offenders against laws, confessedly reasonable and just, nothing is more disagreeable than the idea of punishment. They wish to be exempted from it altogether; or, if that cannot be expected, they ask, "Why are not painful punishments,

"ments mitigated, and those
"of a long duration, shortened?" An eminent * Father of
the church takes notice of an
objection, which was an old
one even in his time. It is,
"That no proportion is ob-
served between the time al-
lowed as a state of trial, and
"an eternal punishment." But the ordinary period of hu-
man life, if well improved, is
long enough to prepare for an
unchangeable state. An end-
less reward promised, and a
punishment of equal duration
threatened, amount to the
strongest motive imaginable in
favour of a religious practice.
A life of ten thousand years,

* Augustine De Civitate Dei.

spent amiss, would but subject the transgressor to a degree of suffering, proportioned to the long-continued abuse of the Divine goodness and patience: Therefore, with respect both to the faithful and the disobedient, God hath manifested much mercy in appointing a short season of trial: and when that short, but precious and irrevocable, season is spent in a manner contradictory to all the known obligations arising from duty and interest, what remains, but that the penalty threatened, and by the transgressor wilfully incurred, should be inflicted? Even in civil constitutions, an offence committed in a moment of time, is often judged worthy of perpetual imprisonment.

imprisonment, exile, or slavery; nay, of the forfeiture even of life itself. The humane and merciful pronounce such punishments, in many cases, just, though they are in some sense eternal, as they continue in force, while the criminal is a subject of civil government. Equitable laws do not proportion penalties to the time necessary for perpetrating a crime, nor always to the nature of the deed done, but to the intention of the mind, which, (in the higher instances of violating moral laws,) is always the real delinquent. The hand which perpetrates a deed of injustice or cruelty, is but the passive instrument of a wicked heart.

Abstracting,

Abstracting from all positive laws, and their penalties, transient acts of violence committed against the laws of nature, often produce such an exquisite and lasting remorse of mind, as is never to be removed, but by the comforts arising from true penitence, and from the assurance of the Divine forgiveness.

To you vain conjectures, and all over-refined abstract disquisitions, concerning the administration of the Supreme Being, must appear frivolous and absurd. It becomes us with humble reverence, to contemplate the surrounding monuments of the Divine Majesty, power, wisdom, and immense goodness; and also of the awful severity of his

his justice. With modesty and sobriety of judgement, it becomes us to acquiesce in those discoveries which he hath made of his moral government. All unwarranted decisions concerning them, favour more of presumption, than of humility and wisdom. They surpass the narrow limits of human comprehension, but perfectly coincide with our natural sentiments of his glory and greatness.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXII.

M A D A M,

IF you were not distinguished by a just contempt of that artificial delicacy, which is affected by too many of your sex and rank; I would not proceed to vindicate the representation given in Scripture of the final punishment of sinners. But to you no part of revelation can be offensive. Happy were it if this, and every other excitement to virtue, were received without prejudice by all.

Such

Such as now despise the threats, contemn the doctrines, and trample upon the laws of the Son of God, will see him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. They will mourn, and, involved in terror and distraction, will call to the mountains and rocks, to cover them from his face, and hide them from his wrath. The folly, the treachery, the odiousness of their vices, will then appear in all their dreadful enormities.

The subjects of their mirth will then become subjects of deep concern;—their contempt of the Grace of the Gospel, will pierce their hearts. They see numbers whom they formerly treated

treated with disdain, rising on every hand, resplendent with lustre of body and mind, whilst they stand trembling at a distance.—Others they behold possessed of that glory, they foolishly rejected;—him their enemy who might have been their friend;—for ever separated from him for vain trifles, shameful pleasures, sordid gains, which now sting as a viper;—all conspire to render their state a condition of “ weeping, wailing, “ and gnashing of teeth.”

Whilst the prodigal is furnished with the means of extravagance, he laughs at the counsels of his friends, and the reproaches of his own mind are felt but in a transient manner;
but

but when he is certified that he is absolutely ruined, he feels his misery. Whilst the blood of the voluptuary rapidly circulates, and his constitution retains it's vigour, he riots with thoughtless joy; but he is overwhelmed with conscious infamy, when his strength, health, and constitution, are irretrievably lost. But why do we employ allusions, which must fall infinitely short of the miseries of the wicked. They lose their souls, and to this no loss can be compared. Insensibility, and a certain callousness, induced upon the mind, have surmounted all the misfortunes of life. But what shall divert the attention, or mitigate the distress, of a man who has lost his soul !

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The rich man in the Gospel, is not charged with gross vice. Good living (as it is falsely called) to the neglect of the grand purposes of his being, was the object of his heart. He is disappointed of happiness, and the combustion, raised by his enraged reflections, produces a request of a drop of water to cool his tongue. But he is separated for ever from consolation and from Lazarus. The distance to which bad men shall be removed from the society of the good, as it is essential to the happiness of the latter, must heighten the miseries of the former. Scarcely can we conceive misery comparable to that of creatures, whose unrestrained passions are irritated and inflamed against

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one another to the highest degree. Their own injuries, and the cause of justice, will, by them, be most dreadfully revenged.

Men who think superficially, and judge of characters and actions only by their immediate visible effects, form a very false judgement concerning the malignity of impiety, and vice. If a man is not an oppressor or a villain, he is accounted harmless, and he is said to hurt nobody but himself. But, in fact, the pernicious influences of impiety and vice often affect numberless multitudes, spread far and wide, and reach to an unmeasurable length. A vain dissipated luxurious life, heedless of God, and regardless

regardless of Religion, and it's institutions, is, perhaps, the most injurious to mankind. The injuries done by such an example, will then be deeply felt,—and must be remembered by the miserable sufferers with keen reproaches, and execrations. Extensive is the influence of the great; and the example of such as are the instructors of others, diffuses itself thro' all degrees. But all, in every rank, who have contributed to dis- countenance piety and virtue, and to bring vice and folly to repute, must, in proportion, ex- perience the upbraiding, and sarcasms, of such as are the vic- tims of their seduction. There is, in vice, a contagion which works mischief all around. E-

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very bad man is tainted, and diffuses the distemper with which he himself is infected. Wicked men are continually injurious to one another; often do they retaliate their mutual injuries; and, by revenging their common wrongs, give vent to their miseries. Who can describe the horrors of that place, in which the rage and indignation of every individual are excited to the utmost? All are sufferers, all are the executioners, of the Divine vengeance! But that this shall be the final issue of a life of final impiety, and wickedness, is no less probable, from the apparent tendencies of things, than certain from the declarations of God in the Gospel.

Happy

Happy are they whose lives are innocent, and inoffensive; whose examples are useful, and edifying! Circumspection, and the most tender regard, to the essential interests of all with whom they are connected, will mark their characters; nor will they disgust the gay and unthinking, by singularities which are of little importance.

Holiness by them will be displayed in all it's native beauties, and invite, by it's attractive powers, the flexible and unprejudiced. Whilst no countenance is given to vice, in any form, they will allow for the weakness and infirmities of human nature, and prove themselves possessed of that wisdom

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that, cometh from above. Tho' to the weak, they may, in certain instances, find it necessary to become weak, they will show no predilection of ignorance, though well disposed; but manifest that preference which is due to erudition, politeness, and refined sentiments, adorned with piety and virtue. Maintaining a constant regard to the final issue of human life, and all it's interests, they will give offence to none; and particularly guard against those rigours and austeries, in action or judgement, that tend to deter the unexperienced from unaffected religion. Distinguished by none of those peculiarities, which make the good done by ^{to} the weak-minded to be evil spoken of,

they will habitually exemplify that moderation and quietness of spirit, whereby genuine Christianity can most effectually be promoted. A sanctimonious outside, employed as a covering for many internal and external corruptions, will, by them, be held in detestation. Nor will they much regard those distinctions, by which men of this character would assume to themselves a name, to which they are not intitled. Peace, charity, and union in the Christian Church, will be considered by them as essentials, never to be sacrificed to the prepossessions of parties, or the interested or fantastical views of men, of any sect or denomination.

I am,
Q 4 Your, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

MADAM,

THIS summary of all that has been propos'd to your consideration, is this. Almighty God, moved by the rectitude of his own nature, in compassion to the miseries of apostate men, appointed his only Son, by whom he made the worlds, to be with him our Mediator. And, in consideration of the guilt contracted, and the punishment incurred by man, "he laid upon him the iniquities of us all." He offers pardon, and recon-

Let. 23. Objections to Grace, &c. 233.

reconciliation, righteousness, and life, through the expiation made by Christ Jesus. Because we are not only weak, but wilful and perverse offenders, the Son of God invites, and, by the most cogent arguments, solicits our acceptance of the grace he hath purchased;—he also sends forth his Spirit into our hearts,—to bring all things to our remembrance,—to lead us into all truth,—to animate us to duty,—to console us in trouble,—to support us in our spiritual conflicts,—and render us more than conquerors. Having all power in heaven and in earth, he erects his empire in our hearts, and, having provided effectually for our deliverance from the wrath to come, is our

surety, to conduct us safely to perfection and glory.

Who, that values his soul, will object to this merciful dispensation? All that are disposed to enter into those conflicts for immortality, to which we are called, will, with the most lively gratitude, embrace the Grace of the Gospel. Men who are full of themselves, and of worldly cares and pleasures, will treat the proposal with contempt, and the messengers of it with indignity and despite. Their shameful proceedings they cover and disguise by every evasion, which subtlety and artifice can invent. But to the grace of God, through Christ Jesus, there is but one objection. It lies deep

deep in the heart. Why is an indolent man averse to business? —A coward, to brave and generous actions? —A profligate, to wisdom and moderation? — Only, because they will not part with a present, for a future enjoyment, tho' the former can bear no comparison with the latter. They will not bear a little present trouble, to avoid an intolerable misery, that is remote. A covetous man will not give up with his projects of immoderate gain, because it is painful to him, even to *think* of it, or of an other world. The sensualist will not abridge his pleasures, nor balk the importunity of his appetites,—because it is painful. It is painful also to one habituated to an indolent

indolent and effeminate life, to reconcile his mind to the dictates of conscience, or common sense.

To this single obstruction, prejudices almost universally entertained against the gospel, and all the opposition it meets with among men, must be ascribed. Were men wise, they would commune with their own hearts, before they proceed to pronounce upon religion; for it is awfully interesting! Let the foes of religion say, with fairness and candour, Are they willing to regulate their own conduct, by the dictates of conscience? He who is not willing to live by this standard, ought not to presume to judge of religion.

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He is not qualified for judging. He counteracts what he himself approves. He, therefore, never will be reconciled to a revelation, which peremptorily obliges him to regulate his life according to this standard. The evidence of revelation, how full soever, will make no alteration on the state of his mind.

On the contrary, such as are inclined to conform their lives to the dictates of conscience, will the more easily be persuaded to embrace the truth. They will yield up their prejudices, and, with these, all their objections; for the latter derive their influence from the former. The truth meeting with less resistance from the will, must operate it's due

due effect upon the understanding.

What, though the discipline of the heart, and the government of the life, be a work of some difficulty? The paths of vice are not all pleasantnes and peace. Men must commit repeated outrages upon themselves, before their choice is reconciled to practices, which reason and conscience condemn. Even after this difficulty is over, the contriving of wickedness in the heart, the watching for opportunities of perpetrating it, and, upon the whole, abstracting from all the miseries consequent to vice, the very fatigue and toil, inseparable from the practice of iniquity, must render it

it an insupportable drudgery. Those who have proceeded far in the gratification of unhallowed passions, must confess that to have mortified them, at first, would have been much easier, than to indulge themselves in all the licentiousness of impiety. *Here, or hereafter,* the violation of conscience must produce pain; pain, from which even the penitent is not exempted!

But not to speak of those, who, with such unwearied watchfulness and toil, nay, "With so much fear and trembling, give all diligence to work out their *destruction*," does it not require much self-denial, much industry, a long and laborious exertion of thought, of resolution,

tion, and enterprise, to excel in any of the common arts of life? The elements of the liberal sciences, too, are intricate; but, that porch once passed, all beyond is facility and pleasure. Those occupations which are difficult in themselves, and are attended with foreseen dangers, men, who love ease and disengagement, as well as others, embrace with courage, and pursue with enthusiasm, from the prospect of rising to affluence, ease, and honour, in the progress of life. Though that prospect is not founded on a moral certainty of success, yet, allured by hope, the expectant is determined to push through every obstruction. Those who are versant in calculating the laws of

of (what is called) chance, judge it wise œconomy, to secure a future increase of property by an expence which, on any other consideration, would be pronounced ridiculous. In short, in every plan of life, to make provision for futurity, is the professed study of every considerate mind. But shall the labours of godliness alone, tho' productive of the most valuable advantages, temporal and eternal, be neglected, shunned, and dreaded, because they are not performed without some degree of difficulty? Admitting all that can reasonably be said of our impotence, and of our aversion from goodness, still Christ's yoke is in itself easy. The renewed Soul feels it to be so, otherwise

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wise there would not be so divine a patience, fortitude, and pleasure, in bearing it. Were we at due pains to overcome our disaffection and prejudices against it; did we faithfully exert the feeble powers we have, God would graciously afford us the support of his heavenly Grace; and then we should, with a holy alacrity and delight, proceed in that work which we now shrink back from, under the unjust notion of it's being impracticable. The same degree of attention, industry, and zeal, which are necessary to make the expert tradesman, the experienced merchant, or the accomplished general, exerted in the study and practice of godliness, and crowned by the Divine

Divine blessing, would suffice to form that most respectable of all characters, — the Genuine Christian.

May the power of the Gospel be manifested among men, in pulling down strong holds, casting down reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought in obedience to Christ.

I am,
Your, &c.
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